Female Serial Killers in History

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Elizabeth Báthory

Confirmed Kills: 80
Suspected: 100–650
Hungary, 16th–17th century

Elizabeth Báthory was born on August 7, 1560, in Nyírbátor, a village within the Kingdom of Hungary, to one of the most powerful Protestant noble families of the region. Her lineage was marked by immense wealth, deep political influence, and dark genetic roots — intermarriages between cousins were common among the Báthory family. She was related to King Stephen Báthory of Poland and the powerful Transylvanian Voivodeship, and thus carried immense prestige from birth.

Raised primarily at the Ecsed Castle, Elizabeth's early environment was one of aristocratic privilege but shadowed by whispers of cruelty and instability. Several of her relatives were reputed for sadistic behavior or occult interests, including an uncle said to dabble in Satanism and an aunt accused of lesbian witchcraft. Such stories — even if exaggerated later by legend — reflect the Gothic atmosphere in which she matured. From early adolescence, she was said to suffer from fits, likely epileptic in nature, which were treated with bloodletting and possibly administered human remedies — a dark foreshadowing of things to come.

She was well educated for her time. Elizabeth could read and write in Hungarian, Latin, and Greek. Her tutors noted her intelligence, and she took great interest in politics, economics, and science. But intelligence did not equate to stability. At age thirteen, she was reportedly engaged in a brief affair with a peasant boy — her pregnancy was concealed, and the child was given away. This event, suppressed and shamed by her family, may have instilled the first deeper psychological wound.

At fifteen, she married Count Ferenc Nádasdy, himself from an influential noble family, in a politically powerful alliance. She retained her surname — a reflection of her higher social rank. Their wedding was lavish, hosted at the grand Nádasdy Castle in Sárvár. As a gift, Ferenc gave Elizabeth Cachtice Castle in present-day Slovakia, a fortress that would later become the epicenter of the bloodiest aristocratic murders in European history.

Historically, the region was in chaos. The Ottoman-Habsburg wars ravaged the land, and the aristocracy lived in a constant state of political and military tension. The nobility were above reproach, rarely investigated, and peasant lives were expendable. Within this environment of absolute power, Elizabeth was both protected and unchecked. Her husband, often away at war, left the estate in her hands, where over time her rule turned cruel. Yet in court records, she was also known to defend Protestant rights and assist poor women — a contradiction that would deepen the mystery around her for centuries.

Elizabeth Báthory's crimes, confirmed and suspected, spanned roughly from 1590 to 1610. The confirmed count stands at 80, based on testimonies and documentation. However, estimates from contemporaries — and the folklore that followed — place the number of victims between 300 and 650, making her the most prolific female serial killer in recorded history.

Her victims were almost exclusively young girls and adolescent women. Initially, they were servant girls — peasant-born and often brought to the castle for domestic work. Later, when rumors began to spread and peasant families stopped sending their daughters, she began luring in girls from lesser noble families, promising education or courtly placement. This expansion of victim class ultimately led to her downfall.
The killing methods varied but shared a theme of intimate, direct violence. Testimonies from over 300 witnesses and servants described beatings with clubs, whips laced with thorns, sewing needles pushed beneath fingernails, and bites torn from flesh. Some girls were left naked in the winter to freeze. Others were burned with hot irons or made to stand for days until they collapsed from exhaustion. Witnesses claimed that Elizabeth bathed in blood — a detail likely added through myth, but symbolic of the real sadism she enacted.
There was no financial motive. These were not killings for gain, but for cruelty, domination, and possibly sexual satisfaction. Some girls were mutilated post-mortem. The castle servants were either terrified into complicity or directly participated in the abuse. Her most infamous accomplices included Anna Darvulia, a supposed witch and former nursemaid, and three servants — Ilona Jó, Dorottya Szentes, and János Újváry (nicknamed Fickó), who helped carry out the daily tortures.
One infamous case describes a noble girl found dead with signs of systematic mutilation. When authorities began investigating due to pressure from noble families, they found fresh corpses and imprisoned girls still chained in the dungeons. The walls of Cachtice Castle became a charnel house. Blood stains, tools of torture, and mass graves lay hidden beneath the stone corridors.
Rituals and repetition marked her actions. She kept a small ledger where, allegedly, she recorded each kill. That book, now lost, was said to list over 650 names. During searches, body parts, unburied corpses, and half-dead girls were found in various rooms. The proximity of the crimes — the comfort with which they were carried out inside her own household — points to a deep delusion of untouchability. She did not hide; she simply ruled.

Elizabeth Báthory was arrested on December 29, 1610, after a direct order by King Matthias II, who sent Count György Thurzó — a relative by marriage — to investigate. Upon entering Cachtice Castle, Thurzó claimed to have caught her “red-handed,” though in reality, this may have been a dramatic flourish to legitimize the noble’s intervention. Nevertheless, bodies were found. Survivors were pulled from the castle’s stone chambers. The case could no longer be ignored.
Báthory was never formally tried in a court — her aristocratic status protected her from public trial and execution. Instead, her accomplices were interrogated, tortured, and executed. Ilona Jó and Dorottya Szentes had their fingers torn off before being burned alive. Fickó was beheaded. Only one woman, Katarina, was spared execution, likely due to minimal involvement.
Elizabeth, however, was sentenced to life imprisonment within her own castle. She was bricked into a set of chambers, with only a small slot left for food and air. No visitors, no light, no trial. This punishment — both isolation and erasure — suited the political needs of the time. She died on August 21, 1614, after four years sealed in stone.

The investigation was thorough but also politically motivated. She owed the king money, and her family's vast landholdings were tempting targets. Some scholars suggest the proceedings were exaggerated, or that rival nobles used the scandal to seize power. However, the physical evidence, the mass of testimony, and the scale of the horror leave little doubt that monstrous crimes occurred under her rule.

The public was never told the full truth. In later centuries, Elizabeth Báthory became a myth — the "Blood Countess," a vampire-like figure haunting horror fiction, folklore, and popular culture. Bram Stoker may have drawn on her when crafting "Dracula." In Hungary and Slovakia, legends about her cruelty survive in folk tales. The motif of bathing in virgins' blood to retain beauty — likely apocryphal — became a cultural myth rooted in her legacy. Today, she is a historical contradiction: a cultivated noblewoman, well educated and politically connected, who descended into obscene cruelty. Whether driven by sadism, madness, delusion of power, or all three, Elizabeth Báthory remains the most infamous female killer in recorded history — a name that stains the walls of castles and memory alike.

Juana Barraza

Confirmed Kills: 42
Suspected: Up to 48
Mexico, 1998–2006

Juana Dayanara Barraza Samperio was born on December 27, 1957, in Epazoyucan, Hidalgo, Mexico, into a life marked by poverty, betrayal, and cruelty. Her mother, Justa Samperio, was an alcoholic prostitute; her father, Trinidad Barraza, was a police officer who reportedly tried to be part of her early life, though was ultimately shut out. Juana's childhood bore no innocence. She later claimed that her mother traded her to a man named José Lugo — an older man — for three beers when Juana was barely a child. She lived with this man for years, during which time she was repeatedly raped and abused. The early years twisted into a nightmare few believed, but her hatred for older women would become the blood-soaked legacy of these wounds.

She never finished school. Education was a distant privilege to those in her surroundings, and she remained illiterate into her teenage years. Instead of a classroom, her upbringing was shaped by survival — domestic work, street markets, caring for her half-siblings. By her mid-teens, she had given birth to a son and lost him years later during a robbery gone wrong. It was the only child she reportedly loved.

What stands out in Juana's background is the psychological isolation. She did not develop the social ties or behaviors that typically link a person to a protective circle. Instead, she grew into adulthood with a narrow focus: hard work, mistrust, and control. She eventually worked as a popcorn vendor in wrestling arenas in Mexico City and began training in lucha libre — a form of Mexican wrestling — under the ring name "La Dama del Silencio" (The Lady of Silence). Her persona was inspired by her quiet rage and stoic presence. Dressed in pink tights and a silver mask, she was a curiosity in a male-dominated sport, known for her strength, broad frame, and silence.

Yet silence is where the hatred gathered. She loathed older women — especially those who reminded her of her mother. The betrayal of childhood would not fade, and in her twisted perception, elderly women became a single, monstrous figure. She learned how to channel violence through physical control, power moves, and sudden, overwhelming attacks — a training that would later serve her during the killings.
Mexico City in the late 1990s was not a safe place for the elderly. Economic decline, urban sprawl, and police indifference made the aged especially vulnerable. Juana Barraza, like a shadow shaped by this very landscape, learned how to vanish after killing — at least for a while.

Juana Barraza's murder spree is believed to have begun around 1998, though the confirmed killings span from 2002 to 2006. The victims were always elderly women, most between the ages of 60 and 90. She targeted them deliberately, and her preferred hunting ground was Mexico City — especially working-class neighborhoods where older women lived alone, unprotected.
She posed as a nurse, social worker, or government official offering aid for senior citizens. With forged credentials and dressed respectably, she gained the victims' trust. In some cases, she had been seen assisting them into their homes, sometimes even helping with chores before striking. Once inside, she used brute force: ligatures fashioned from pantyhose, telephone cords, or scarves to strangle them. Some she beat severely. There were no drawn-out tortures — her killings were swift, direct, and silent. The method was suffocation and strangulation, always by hand or with cloth, with strength far above what her victims could resist.
There was no ritual, no mutilation, no signatures in blood. What she left was absence — a dead body, neatly laid out, often covered with a blanket or sheet. The gesture of covering them was noted by investigators as either a sign of remorse or, more likely, control — a last act of dominance, defining the end as she pleased. In some cases, items were stolen: jewelry, cash, identification cards. But the thefts were secondary. The motive was rage, not gain.
She favored chaos. When one murder scene began to cool, another would erupt blocks away. The killings created a citywide panic. Mexico had rarely known a female serial killer, and the very idea was dismissed for years. Some investigators refused to believe a woman was behind the killings, insisting it had to be a man in disguise. Police sketches varied wildly. False arrests were made. An entire drag community was targeted and harassed under the presumption that the killer was a man dressed as a woman. Misogyny clouded the search.
What united the victims was more than their age. All lived alone. All had recently interacted with social programs. Many trusted strangers. In a country where elders are often culturally respected, the targeting of them struck a deep, collective nerve. Still, Barraza walked the streets untouched.
One of the more chilling cases was the murder of Ana María de los Reyes, age 82, found strangled in her apartment in 2005. Her neck was broken, her body carefully positioned, and her pension card was missing. When police canvassed the building, witnesses described a large woman with a man's hands, wearing makeup and formal clothing. They said she was calm, polite. She smiled and thanked them as she left.

The Lady of Silence was hunting by day, wrestling by night. Her double life — athlete and murderer — had begun to fray.

Juana Barraza was caught on January 25, 2006, moments after murdering 82-year-old Ana María de los Reyes Alfaro in the Venustiano Carranza neighborhood of Mexico City. A tenant returning home found the door ajar and the killer still inside. Barraza fled, but neighbors gave chase, and she was caught just blocks away by police — with her wrestling gear and a stethoscope in her bag.

At the police station, her past identity began to unravel. Her fingerprints matched several unsolved murder scenes. Witnesses began identifying her with growing confidence. She confessed to one murder — Ana María's — but denied the others. Investigators, however, linked her to at least 42 cases through forensic evidence, matching witness descriptions, and her proximity to social programs' client lists. The consistency of method, signature items missing, and repeated patterns left little doubt.

During trial, prosecutors focused on a pattern of premeditated murder. The defense argued she suffered from dissociative identity disorder and was a victim of past abuse, hoping to reduce the sentence. Psychiatric evaluations found her intelligent, emotionally cold, with a profound narcissistic tendency. There was no diagnosis of psychosis.

The trial became a media storm. Reporters flooded the courtroom. She was dubbed "La Mataviejitas" — "The Little Old Lady Killer" — a nickname that combined grotesque crime with tabloid mockery. Her case forced the public to reckon with female violence, class failure, and the illusion of safety for the aged. In a male-dominated criminal culture, her case shattered assumptions. A woman — and one who once played a hero in wrestling arenas — had become the nation's most terrifying killer.

On March 31, 2008, Juana Barraza was found guilty on 16 counts of murder and aggravated burglary and sentenced to 759 years in prison. She would never be free again. She was sent to the Santa Martha Acatitla women's prison, where she remains today.

Her legacy is paradoxical. To some, she is a symptom of Mexico's institutional decay: a society where women fall through every social crack and emerge shaped by rage. To others, she is a nightmare incarnate — a killer who destroyed the dignity of elderhood. The mask she wore in the wrestling ring became a symbol: not of fame, but of what hides behind politeness, silence, and a practiced smile.

Daria Saltikova

Confirmed Kills: 38
Suspected: Up to 100
Russia, around 1762

The year was 1762 and the screams had finally stopped echoing through the grand estate in Moscow. Inside the opulent mansion, investigators made a discovery that would shake the very foundations of Russian aristocracy. Bodies of young women, some barely more than children, bore the unmistakable marks of systematic torture. Their skin told stories of unimaginable brutality, burns from scolding water, wounds from beating implements,

evidence of prolonged suffering that defied comprehension. The woman responsible sat in chains, her once pristine noble dress now stained with the blood of her victims. Daria Nikolajevna Saltikova, one of Moscow's wealthiest widows, had been living a double life. By day, she was the respectable lady of the manor, entertaining guests and managing her vast estates. By night, she descended into the depths of human cruelty, transforming her home into a chamber of horrors, where young women met their deaths in the most agonizing ways imaginable. The official count would reach 38 confirmed murders, but investigators suspected the true number exceeded 100. These weren't crimes of passion or desperation. They were calculated acts of sadistic pleasure carried out over years by a woman who wielded absolute power over the lives of those beneath her social station. As news of the arrest spread through Moscow's high society, a chilling realization took hold. The woman they had known as a pillar of the community was in fact one of history's most prolific serial killers. The investigation would expose a reign of terror that had been hidden behind the closed doors of Russian nobility, protected by a system that valued social status over human life. Before we dive into this disturbing case, make sure to subscribe and hit that notification bell so you never miss our latest true crime stories. To understand how Daria Saltikova became one of history's most notorious serial killers, we must first examine the world that shaped her. Born on March 11th, 1730 in Moscow, Daria Nikolajevna Ivanova entered a world of immense privilege and absolute power. Her father Nikolai Aftonomovic Ivanov was a wealthy nobleman who had accumulated vast estates across the Russian Empire. Her mother, Anna Ivanovna Davididova, came from an equally prestigious family with deep connections to the imperial court. The Russia of Daria's childhood was a land of extreme contrasts. While the nobility lived in unprecedented luxury, the vast majority of the population existed as surfs, a class of people who were legally bound to the land and their masters. These surfs were considered property to be bought, sold, and treated according to their owners whims. The system granted absolute authority to land owners over their human possessions with virtually no legal recourse for abuse. From her earliest days, Daria was raised to believe in her inherent superiority over the common people. The young noble girl grew up surrounded by servants who existed solely to fulfill her every desire. Any sign of disobedience or perceived disrespect could be met with swift and brutal punishment. A lesson that would prove catastrophic in the years to come. The Ivanov family's wealth allowed them to provide Daria with the finest education available to Russian women of her era. She learned French, German, and Italian, studied literature and the arts, and was trained in the social graces expected of a noble woman. However, beneath this cultured exterior, something darker was taking root. Those who knew Daria during her youth would later recall disturbing incidents that hinted at her future brutality. Servants spoke in hushed tones about her violent outbursts toward younger children and her apparent pleasure in witnessing the punishment of disobedient surfs. While such behavior might have been addressed in a different family, the Ivanovs dismissed these incidents as signs of a strong will, a desirable trait in a noble daughter destined to manage large estates. At the age of 22, Daria married Glare Balikovich Saltikov, a member of one of Russia's most powerful noble families. The Saltikov name carried immense weight in imperial circles, and the marriage significantly elevated Daaria's social position. The union produced two sons and for a time it appeared that Daria had settled into the conventional role of a noble wife and mother. However, tragedy struck in 1756 when

Gleb died suddenly leaving Daria a widow at just 26 years old. The death of her husband marked a turning point in her life, transforming her from a privileged wife into one of Moscow's wealthiest and most powerful women. She inherited not just vast material wealth but absolute control over thousands of surfs across multiple estates. The newly widowed Saltikova threw herself into managing her properties with an intensity that surprised even her closest associates. She became known for her meticulous attention to detail and her demands for perfection from her servants. What began as strict management gradually evolved into something far more sinister. The isolation of widowhood seemed to amplify the darker aspects of Daria's personality. With no husband to moderate her behavior and no legal authority to challenge her treatment of surfs, she found herself in a position of unprecedented power. The young women who served in her household became the unfortunate targets of her increasing violent tendencies. Initially, the punishments Daria inflicted might have seemed extreme, but not entirely unusual for the time. A surf who broke a dish might receive a severe beating. A girl who was perceived as lazy might be denied food for days. However, as the months passed, these punishments became increasingly brutal and creative in their cruelty. The transformation from strict mistress to sadistic killer didn't happen overnight. It was a gradual descent into madness, fueled by absolute power and a complete lack of accountability. The serfs under her control lived in constant terror, never knowing when their lady's mood might turn deadly. By 1757, just a year after her husband's death, Daria had claimed her first victim. A young surf girl, barely 16 years old, was beaten to death for the crime of allegedly stealing a piece of bread. The official cause of death was listed as an accident, and no investigation was conducted. The precedent was set. Daria Saltikova had learned that she could quite literally get away with murder. The death of that first victim unleashed something monstrous within Daria Saltikova. What had been sporadic violence now became systematic torture, carried out with a methodical precision that revealed the true depths of her depravity. The grand estate that had once been a symbol of Russian nobility became a house of horrors where young women faced unimaginable suffering. Saltyova's victims were almost exclusively female surfs, typically between the ages of 12 and 25. She showed a particular preference for targeting women who were considered attractive or who had somehow drawn her attention through perceived slights or mistakes. The randomness of her fury meant that no one in her household was truly safe. A smile interpreted as insolence, a stumble while serving tea, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time could seal a young woman's fate. The methods of torture Seltikova employed were as varied as they were brutal. She would order her victims to be stripped and beaten with clubs, whips, and metal rods until they could no longer stand. Boiling water was poured over their naked bodies, causing horrific burns that would fester for days before ultimately leading to death. Some victims were forced to stand naked in the bitter Russian winter until they froze to death, while others were locked in sauners heated to unbearable temperatures. Perhaps most chilling was the calculated nature of these attacks. Seltikova didn't kill in fits of rage. She planned her tortures carefully, often spacing them out over days or weeks to prolong her victim's suffering. She kept detailed records of punishments, treating the systematic murder of human beings as if it were a business transaction. The estates other surfs were forced to witness these horrors, serving as unwilling participants in their mistress's sadistic games. Some were ordered to carry out the actual torture, knowing that refusal would make them the next victim.

This created an atmosphere of terror that extended far beyond the immediate victims, traumatizing entire communities of people who were powerless to escape or seek help. Word of Seltikova's cruelty began to spread through Moscow's servant networks, but the stories were often dismissed as exaggerated gossip. The idea that a respectable noble woman could be capable of such extreme violence seemed impossible to those who only knew her public persona. At social gatherings, Seltikova continued to play the role of the cultured aristocrat, discussing literature and politics with the same lips that had screamed orders for torture just hours earlier. The psychological impact on her surviving surfs was profound. Many developed severe trauma responses, becoming unable to speak or function normally. Others attempted to flee, but the legal system provided no protection for runaway surfs. Those who were caught faced punishments that were often worse than what they had initially tried to escape. As the death toll mounted, Salty Kova became increasingly bold in her methods. She began to invite other nobles to witness her disciplinary sessions, framing the torture as necessary punishment for disobedient servants. Some guests were horrified and left immediately, but others showed a disturbing fascination with the spectacle, further enabling her behavior. The exact number of victims during this period may never be known. Recordkeeping for surf deaths was minimal, and many murders were covered up or reported as accidents. Conservative estimates suggest that Saltikova killed at least one person every few weeks during the height of her reign of terror, which lasted for nearly 6 years. One particularly horrific incident involved a young surf named Mara, who had been assigned to tend to Seltikova's personal chambers. The girl accidentally knocked over a bottle of perfume, causing it to shatter on the marble floor. Seltikova's reaction was swift and merciless. She ordered Mara to be tied to a chair and subjected to a series of tortures that lasted for 3 days. The girl's screams could be heard throughout the estate, but no one dared to intervene. On the first day, boiling water was poured over Mara's feet and legs. On the second day, her hands were burned with hot metal implements. On the third day, she was beaten with clubs until her body was broken beyond repair. She died that evening and her body was secretly buried in the estate's grounds with the dozens of others who had met similar fates. The psychological profile that emerges from these accounts is that of a woman who had descended into complete moral bankruptcy. Saltikova appeared to derive genuine pleasure from the suffering of others, often laughing or smiling during the torture sessions. Former servants who survived her reign described her as seeming most alive when she was inflicting pain, as if the act of dominating and destroying other human beings was the only thing that gave her life meaning. The social dynamics of 18th century Russia enabled and protected her crimes. The legal system provided no recourse for surfs who were mistreated by their masters, and the noble class was largely self-regulating. As long as Saltikova maintained her public facade and didn't interfere with the property or interests of other nobles, she was free to terrorize her own surfs without interference. This period of unchecked violence lasted from 1757 to 1762, 5 years during which Seltikova transformed from a grieving widow into one of history's most prolific serial killers. The woman who had once been known for her intelligence and social grace had become a monster who found satisfaction only in the complete domination and destruction of those she perceived as beneath her. The beginning of the end for Daria Salikova came not from the authorities but from the desperate actions of those who had suffered under her reign of terror. In 1762, two surf women named Savilei

Martanov and Ilin made a decision that would change everything. They decided to risk their lives to seek justice for the countless victims who had died in silence. The decision to come forward was not made lightly. Under Russian law, surfs who made false accusations against their masters faced severe punishment, including potential death. However, the continued murders had created such an atmosphere of terror that some felt they had nothing left to lose. The two women had witnessed numerous killings firsthand and could no longer remain silent while more of their friends and family members were tortured to death. Their first attempts to report Seltikova's crimes were met with dismissal and hostility. Local officials, many of whom had social or business connections to the Seltikov family, refused to take the accusations seriously. The idea that a respected noble woman could be guilty of such extreme crimes seemed preposterous to men who had never witnessed the reality of life within her estate. However, the women's persistence eventually caught the attention of a lower level official who was willing to listen. The details they provided were too specific and too consistent to be dismissed as fabricated stories. They described not just the murders they had witnessed, but also the locations where bodies had been buried, the specific methods of torture used, and the names of other potential witnesses. The official who first took their report was faced with a dilemma. Investigating a member of the nobility required authorization from much higher authorities, and making false accusations against the wealthy and powerful could end his career. However, the evidence presented was compelling enough that he felt compelled to pass the information up the chain of command. The case eventually reached the attention of Empress Catherine II, who had recently ascended to the throne. Catherine, later known as Catherine the Great, was attempting to position herself as an enlightened ruler who would modernize Russia and improve conditions for all her subjects. The accusations against Saltikova presented both a challenge and an opportunity. Ignoring such serious crimes would undermine her reputation, but prosecuting a member of the nobility could create dangerous precedents. Catherine ordered a formal investigation, assigning the case to Alexander Glaboff, a trusted official known for his integrity and thoroughess. Glabbof understood the delicate nature of the situation and approached the investigation with appropriate gravity. He knew that any misstep could have serious political consequences, but he also recognized that the evidence suggested crimes of unprecedented scale. The investigation team that arrived at Saltikova's estate in the fall of 1762 was prepared for disturbing discoveries, but even they were shocked by what they found. The estate grounds yielded the remains of dozens of victims, many showing clear signs of torture. The bodies were buried in shallow graves throughout the property, some so recent that decomposition had barely begun. Physical evidence of the torture chambers was discovered in the basement and outbuildings of the main house. Investigators found implements that had been used for beatings, metal tools that showed signs of having been heated and used to burn human flesh, and restraints that had been used to hold victims during prolonged torture sessions. The systematic nature of the setup suggested that this was not sporadic violence but a carefully organized operation. The investigation team also discovered Sultikova's personal records which included detailed notes about punishments administered to various surfs. These documents provided a chilling insight into her mindset revealing that she had treated the torture and murder of human beings as administrative tasks worthy of careful documentation. Witness testimony proved crucial to building the case. Despite their fear, many surviving

serfs came forward to provide evidence about what they had witnessed. Their accounts painted a picture of systematic brutality that had been ongoing for years. Some witnesses described specific murders in detail, while others provided information about the disposal of bodies and the methods used to conceal the crimes. The investigation also uncovered evidence of complicity by some of Saltikova's household staff. Several servants had been forced to participate in the torture sessions, while others had been responsible for disposing of bodies and covering up evidence. The investigators faced the challenge of determining who had been willing participants versus those who had been coerced into compliance through fear. As the investigation expanded, it became clear that the scope of Saltikova's crimes was even greater than initially suspected. Evidence suggested that she had been killing surfs across multiple properties, not just at her main estate. The investigation team was forced to expand their search to include several other locations where additional victims were discovered. The process of documenting the crimes was painstaking and emotionally devastating for all involved. Each victim had to be identified when possible and their manner of death had to be determined through examination of physical remains. The investigators found themselves confronting evidence of torture methods that challenged their understanding of human cruelty. One of the most disturbing discoveries was a series of letters that Saltikova had written to friends and family during the period when she was actively committing murders. These letters filled with discussions of social events and daily life showed no hint of the horrific crimes she was simultaneously carrying out. The disconnect between her public persona and private actions revealed a level of psychological compartmentalization that shocked even experienced investigators. The investigation also revealed the extent to which the feudal system had enabled and protected Saltikova's crimes. The absolute power granted to nobles over their surfs, combined with the lack of legal recourse for abuse, had created an environment where such extreme violence could continue unchecked for years. This realization had profound implications for Russian society and would later influence reforms in the treatment of surfs. As evidence mounted, it became clear that Saltikova had been responsible for the deaths of far more people than could be definitively proven. The investigation team estimated that the true number of victims likely exceeded 100, making her one of the most prolific serial killers in recorded history. However, the degraded state of some remains and the passage of time meant that many cases could not be definitively linked to her actions. The investigation concluded in 1764 with the compilation of evidence that would be used in Saltikova's trial. The case files contained testimony from dozens of witnesses, physical evidence from multiple crime scenes, and documentation of systematic torture and murder spanning nearly 6 years. The investigation had revealed not just the crimes of one individual, but the institutional failures that had allowed such atrocities to continue unchecked. The trial of Daria Saltikova represented an unprecedented moment in Russian legal history. Never before had a member of the high nobility been brought to account for the systematic murder of surfs on such a massive scale. The proceedings which began in 1764 would test the limits of Katherine II's commitment to justice and reform while navigating the treacherous waters of aristocratic privilege and political necessity. The formal charges against Saltikova included 38 counts of murder, though investigators suspected the true number was far higher. The decision to limit the charges to cases where evidence was absolutely conclusive reflected the politically sensitive

nature of the prosecution. Each count had to be supported by multiple witnesses, physical evidence or documentation that could withstand scrutiny from Saltikova's defense team. The trial itself was conducted with unusual secrecy reflecting the government's concern about public reaction to the revelations. While details of the case had begun to circulate through Moscow society, the full extent of Seltikova's crimes was not yet widely known. Katherine II was particularly concerned about maintaining the stability of the noble class while still demonstrating that justice would be served. Saltikova's defense strategy relied heavily on challenging the credibility of surf witnesses and arguing that the charges were exaggerated by enemies seeking to destroy her reputation. Her lawyers contended that the deaths were the result of legitimate punishment that had accidentally gone too far rather than premeditated murder. They also argued that the testimony of surfs should not be given equal weight to that of nobles in a court of law. However, the physical evidence proved overwhelming. The systematic nature of the torture, the careful documentation of punishments, and the methodical disposal of bodies all pointed to calculated murder rather than accidental deaths during punishment. The prosecution was able to present a compelling case that Saltikova had derived pleasure from the suffering of others and had gradually escalated her violence over time. One of the most damaging pieces of evidence was Saltikova's own records, which detailed punishments with a level of specificity that suggested she had been keeping track of her crimes as trophies. These documents, written in her own hand, provided direct evidence of premeditation and planning that contradicted her defense team's claims of accidental death. The testimony of surviving serfs proved crucial to the prosecution's case. Despite their fear and the social barriers to their testimony being accepted, many came forward to provide detailed accounts of what they had witnessed. Their stories, corroborated by physical evidence and documentation, painted a picture of systematic brutality that could not be explained away as legitimate punishment. Perhaps most compelling were the testimonies of victims who had somehow survived Saltikova's torture sessions. These women, bearing permanent physical scars from their orals, provided firsthand accounts of the deliberate and sadistic nature of the violence they had endured. Their survival offered a unique window into the psychological state of their tormentor and the calculated nature of her crimes. The trial also revealed disturbing details about the social dynamics within Saltyova's household. Some servants had been forced to participate in the torture sessions, while others had been required to dispose of bodies and clean up evidence. The prosecution had to carefully navigate the question of complicity, recognizing that many of these individuals had been coerced into participation through fear for their own lives. As the trial progressed, it became clear that Saltikova showed no remorse for her actions. Contemporary accounts describe her as appearing bored or irritated during proceedings, occasionally laughing at witness testimony, or making dismissive comments about the accusations. Her lack of empathy or recognition of wrongdoing reinforced the prosecution's argument that she represented a continuing danger to society. The defense's attempts to portray Seltikova as a victim of circumstances or mental illness were undermined by evidence of her careful planning and the systematic nature of her crimes. The elaborate torture methods, the detailed recordkeeping, and the yearslong pattern of behavior all suggested someone who was fully aware of her actions and their consequences. The trial also highlighted the broader social issues that had enabled Seltikova's crimes. The absolute power granted to nobles over their surfs, the lack of legal recourse for

abuse, and the social barriers that prevented victims from seeking help all came under scrutiny. The case became a symbol of the need for reform in Russian society. Though meaningful change would be slow in coming. After months of testimony and deliberation, the court reached its verdict in 1768. Saltikova was found guilty of murdering 38 surfs and was convicted of the systematic torture and abuse of many others. The conviction represented a landmark moment in Russian legal history, marking the first time that a member of the high nobility had been held accountable for the mass murder of surfs. The question of punishment presented Katherine II with a complex political challenge. The traditional penalty for such crimes would have been death, but Russia had officially abolished capital punishment in 1754. Additionally, executing a member of the nobility could create a dangerous precedent that might threaten the stability of the aristocratic class that supported Catherine's rule. The sentence ultimately imposed reflected these political considerations while still attempting to deliver meaningful justice. Saltikova was sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement. But first, she would face public humiliation designed to demonstrate that even the nobility were subject to the law. The specifics of her punishment would send a clear message about the consequences of abusing power while stopping short of the ultimate penalty. On June 12th, 1768, Saltikova was chained to a pillary in Moscow's Red Square for 1 hour, during which time a herald read aloud the details of her crimes to the assembled crowd. The public humiliation of a noble woman in such a manner was unprecedented in Russian history and drew thousands of spectators who came to witness this historic moment of justice. The crowd's reaction was reportedly mixed. While many celebrated seeing justice served for the victims, others were disturbed by the spectacle of a noble woman being subjected to such public shame. The event highlighted the deep social divisions in Russian society and the complex relationship between justice and social order. Following her public humiliation, Saltikova was transported to the Ivanovski convent in Moscow, where she would spend the remainder of her life in solitary confinement. The sentence specified that she would never be released and would have no contact with the outside world except for basic necessities provided by the convent's nuns. The trial and sentencing of Daria Saltikova marked a turning point in Russian legal history and social consciousness. For the first time, the absolute power of the nobility over their serfs had been challenged in a court of law and meaningful consequences had been imposed for its abuse. While the case did not immediately lead to broader reforms in the treatment of surfs, it established important precedents for accountability and justice that would influence future legal developments. The imprisonment of Daria Seltikova marked the end of her reign of terror, but the impact of her crimes continued to reverberate through Russian society for decades to come. Her case became a symbol of the extremes of aristocratic privilege and the urgent need for social reform while also serving as a cautionary tale about the corrupting influence of absolute power. Saltikova's life in solitary confinement at the Ivanovski convent was deliberately harsh and isolating. She was confined to a small cell in the basement of the convent with only a tiny window that barely admitted light. The cell was furnished with only the most basic necessities, a bed, a table, and a chair. She was forbidden from having any visitors or correspondence with the outside world, effectively making her a living ghost. The conditions of her imprisonment were designed to be a form of living death, reflecting the severity of her crimes while stopping short of actual execution. She was provided with simple food and basic medical

care, but was denied any of the comforts or luxuries that had characterized her previous life. The psychological impact of this isolation was profound, and reports from the convent nuns suggested that she quickly began to show signs of mental deterioration. Contemporary accounts describe Seltikova as becoming increasingly erratic and paranoid during her imprisonment. She would often speak to imaginary visitors, reenacting conversations from her past life as a noble woman. Sometimes she would scream about seeing the faces of her victims, suggesting that she was haunted by memories of her crimes. Whether these episodes represented genuine remorse or simply the effects of prolonged isolation remains unclear. The case had significant implications for Russian legal and social development. Katherine II used Saltikova's crimes as evidence of the need for legal reforms that would provide better protection for surfs and other vulnerable populations. While meaningful change was slow in coming, the case helped establish the principle that even the nobility were subject to the law when their actions crossed certain boundaries. The investigation and trial also revealed the extent to which the feudal system had enabled and protected extreme abuse. The absolute power granted to nobles over their surfs, combined with the lack of legal recourse for victims, had created an environment where such horrific crimes could continue unchecked for years. This realization contributed to growing calls for reform among progressive elements of Russian society. The case became a subject of fascination for writers, historians, and social critics both in Russia and abroad. The story of a noble woman who had descended into such extreme depravity captured the imagination of those who saw it as a symbol of the moral bankruptcy of the aristocratic system. Various accounts of her crimes were published, though many were sensationalized or embellished for dramatic effect. The impact on the surviving surfs from Saltikova's estates was profound and lasting. Many suffered from what would now be recognized as severe trauma, exhibiting symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. The community that had lived under her rule required years to recover from the psychological damage inflicted by her reign of terror. Some of the surviving victims were relocated to other estates, while others were granted their freedom as a form of compensation for their suffering. However, the legal system of the time provided little in the way of formal support or recognition for trauma victims, leaving many to cope with their experiences in isolation. The case also influenced the development of criminal psychology and the study of serial killing behavior. Saltikova's systematic approach to torture and murder combined with her apparent lack of remorse provided early insights into the mindset of serial killers. Her case is often cited by modern criminologists as an example of how absolute power can corrupt individuals and enable extreme violence. The story of Daria Saltikova has continued to fascinate people well into the modern era. She is often compared to other historical figures who committed similar crimes such as Elizabeth Baie, the Hungarian blood countess who allegedly murdered hundreds of young women in the early 17th century. These comparisons highlight how the combination of absolute power and psychological dysfunction can lead to horrific outcomes across different times and cultures. Modern psychological analysis of Saltikova's case suggests that she may have suffered from several mental health conditions, including antisocial personality disorder and possibly sadistic personality disorder. However, the lack of detailed psychological records from the time makes definitive diagnosis impossible. What is clear is that her case represents one of the most extreme examples of serial killing in recorded history. The legacy of her crimes also contributed to changing

attitudes toward the treatment of surfs in Russia. While the feudal system would persist for another century, the Saltikova case helped establish the principle that there should be limits to the power of masters over their human property. This gradually led to legal reforms that provided some protection for surfs, though meaningful change was slow and incomplete. Saltikova died in her cell on December 9th, 1801 at the age of 71, having spent 33 years in solitary confinement. Her death was noted only briefly in official records, and she was buried in an unmarked grave within the convent grounds. The woman, who had once been one of Moscow's most powerful and feared residents, died in complete obscurity, her name known only as a symbol of cruelty and abuse. The final irony of her story is that her crimes intended to demonstrate her power and superiority over those she considered beneath her ultimately led to her complete destruction and the loss of everything she had valued. Her case serves as a powerful reminder of how the abuse of power can corrupt even those who seem to have everything and how justice, though sometimes delayed, can ultimately prevail. Her story continues to be studied and retold as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked power and the importance of protecting society's most vulnerable members. The case of Daria Saltikova remains one of the most chilling examples of how ordinary evil can flourish when systems fail to protect the innocent and hold the powerful accountable for their actions. The impact of her crimes extended far beyond her individual victims, influencing legal development, social reform, and our understanding of criminal behavior. Her case reminds us that the capacity for extreme evil exists within human nature, and that vigilance is required to prevent such atrocities from occurring again. Thanks for watching. If you found this case fascinating, don't forget to subscribe and turn on notifications for more stories like this one.

Jane Toppan

Confirmed Kills: 31
Estimated kills: Up to 70
Boston, Massachusetts, 1854–1938

The summer of 1901 brought death to a quiet cottage on Cape Cod. Inside the modest home in Couttormtit, Massachusetts, 70-year-old Alden Davis lay dying in his bed, his breathing shallow and labored. His family gathered around him, believing he was succumbing to the same mysterious illness that had claimed his wife, Mattie, just weeks earlier. What they couldn't have known was that their trusted family friend, the cheerful nurse who had come to care for them in their time of need, was methodically poisoning each of them with morphine and atropene. Jane Toppen, beloved by her patients and colleagues alike, had earned the nickname Jolly Jane for her warm demeanor and infectious laughter. But behind her caring facade lived one of America's most prolific serial killers. Over the next few weeks, Olden Davis would die, followed by his sister Edna and then his daughters Minnie and Genevieve. Four members of the same family, all dead within a matter of weeks. The surviving family members, devastated by their losses, would never suspect that their grief was orchestrated by the very woman they had trusted to provide comfort and care. When authorities finally arrested Jane Toppen in October 1901, she would confess to 31 murders. But investigators suspected the true number was far higher, possibly over 100 victims across her 6-year killing

spree. Her method was always the same, a lethal injection administered by a trusted nurse, followed by an intimate vigil as she watched her victims die. Before we dive into this chilling story, if you're interested in true crime cases like this one, make sure to hit that subscribe button and turn on notifications so you never miss our latest episodes. To understand how Jane Toppen became one of America's most notorious serial killers, we must begin with her tragic childhood. Born Anora Kelly on March 31st, 1854 in Boston, Massachusetts, she entered the world as the daughter of Irish immigrants struggling to survive in a country that offered them little welcome. Her father, Peter Kelly, was a tor who had fled the poverty and oppression of Ireland, hoping to build a better life in America. But the discrimination faced by Irish immigrants in the mid 1800s was severe, and Peter found himself trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair. He became known in their neighborhood as Kelly the Croc, a derogatory reference to his heavy drinking and increasingly erratic behavior. The family lived in squalor in Boston's crowded tenement district where disease and death were constant companions. When Anora was just 6 years old, her mother succumbed to tuberculosis, a common killer in the overcrowded immigrant neighborhoods. The loss devastated Peter, driving him deeper into alcoholism and rendering him unable to care for his four daughters. In 1863, overwhelmed by grief and financial desperation, Peter Kelly made a decision that would shape the rest of his youngest daughter's life, he surrendered Anora and her three sisters to the Boston Female Asylum for Destitute Girls, an institution designed to house orphaned and abandoned children. The asylum's records described the Kelly sisters as children who appeared to have been rescued from a very miserable home. Life at the asylum was harsh but structured. The girls lived in dormatory style rooms, followed strict schedules, and received basic education along with training in domestic skills. However, the institution's primary purpose was not to provide loving care, but to prepare the girls for lives of service. Most would eventually be placed as servants or factory workers with little hope of rising above their station. The asylum system operated on a philosophy of moral reformation, believing that proper discipline and religious instruction could overcome the supposed moral failings of the poor. For a sensitive child like Anora, already traumatized by abandonment and loss, this environment provided little emotional nurturing. Instead, she learned to wear a mask of cheerfulness and compliance, skills that would serve her well in her later life of deception. In November 1864, when Anora was 10 years old, her life took another dramatic turn. Mrs. Anne C. To Tppen, the wife of a successful businessman from Lel, Massachusetts, appeared before the asylum's board of directors. She requested to adopt Anora, though the arrangement was technically an indenture, a form of bound labor that was common at the time. The Toppen family lived a comfortable middle-class life in Lel, a bustling mill town about 30 mi north of Boston. They had no children of their own, and Mrs. Toppen may have been motivated by both charitable impulses and the practical need for domestic help. Under the terms of the indenture, Anora would serve the family until she reached the age of majority in exchange for room, board, and basic education. The transition to the Toppen household was dramatic for young Anora. She was given a new name, Jane, and was expected to adapt to a life of relative comfort compared to her previous circumstances. The Toppens provided her with clean clothes, regular meals, and a private room. However, the relationship was complicated by the fact that Jane was neither a true daughter nor a simple servant. She occupied an ambiguous position that left her feeling perpetually insecure about her place in

the family. Mrs. Toppen was reportedly kind to Jane, treating her more like a daughter than a servant. However, Jane's legal status remained that of an indentured servant, and she was acutely aware that her position depended entirely on the family's continued goodwill. This uncertainty may have contributed to her desperate need for approval and attention that would characterize her adult relationships. As Jane grew into adolescence, she began to display the personality traits that would later make her both beloved and deadly. She was vivacious and outgoing with a talent for making others feel comfortable and appreciated. Her fellow students at the local school remembered her as funny and charming, always ready with a joke or a kind word. She earned the nickname Jolly Jane during these years, a moniker that would follow her throughout her life. However, beneath Jane's cheerful exterior lay a deep well of psychological damage. The abandonment by her father, the loss of her mother, and the uncertainty of her position in the Toppen household had created a personality that craved control and attention. She began to exhibit concerning behaviors, including a fascination with death and illness that went beyond normal childhood curiosity. Jane's academic performance was mediocre, but her social skills were exceptional. She had an intuitive understanding of what others wanted to hear and became skilled at manipulating situations to her advantage. These abilities would prove invaluable in her chosen profession, where patients and colleagues alike would come to trust her completely. When Jane reached her majority in 1875, she was free to leave the Toppen household. However, she had developed a close relationship with Mrs. Toppen, who had become the closest thing to a mother she had known since early childhood. Rather than strike out on her own, Jane chose to remain with the family, transitioning from indentured servant to unofficial adopted daughter. This decision reflected Jane's deep-seated need for security and belonging. The Toppen household provided her with stability and social standing that she could never have achieved on her own. However, it also reinforced her dependence on the approval and affection of others, a dependence that would later drive her to murder. During her late teens and early 20s, Jane began to develop romantic relationships with local young men. However, these relationships were consistently unsuccessful, often ending when the men discovered her true background or when her increasingly possessive behavior drove them away. Each rejection reinforced her sense of inadequacy and fueled her growing resentment toward those who seemed to have the love and acceptance she craved. By the time Jane was in her mid20s, she had begun to exhibit the psychological patterns that would define her as a serial killer. She had learned to present a charming public face while harboring deep feelings of rage and inadequacy. She had developed a need to control others and a fascination with the boundary between life and death. Most importantly, she had discovered that her greatest talent lay in her ability to gain the trust and affection of others, a talent she would soon weaponize in the most horrific way possible. The decision to become a nurse was both practical and psychological for Jane. The profession offered her a path to independence and respect that few other careers provided for women in the 1880s. It also gave her access to the drugs and knowledge she would need to carry out her crimes, as well as the intimate contact with vulnerable people that fed her psychological needs. In 1885, at the age of 31, Jane enrolled in the nursing program at Cambridge Hospital in Massachusetts. The program was demanding, requiring students to master not only medical techniques, but also the complex social dynamics of hospital life. Jane excelled in both areas, quickly becoming popular with both patients and staff. Her

fellow nursing students remembered her as endlessly cheerful and helpful, always ready to take on extra duties or comfort a distressed patient. She had a particular talent for working with elderly patients who often found her warm personality and attentive care deeply comforting. Many would specifically request Jane's services, praising her to hospital administrators and recommending her to friends and family members. However, Jane's exceptional popularity with patients served a darker purpose. During her training, she began to experiment with the drugs available to her, learning how different substances affected the human body. She was particularly interested in morphine and atropene, two drugs commonly used in medical practice, but deadly in the wrong doses. Jane's first known murder occurred in 1895, shortly after she had completed her nursing training and begun working as a private duty nurse. The victim was Elizabeth Bighgam, the elderly woman who had become Jane's foster sister when the Toppen family took her in. Elizabeth had been suffering from depression and declining health, making her an ideal target for Jane's first experiment in murder. Jane administered a lethal dose of morphine to Elizabeth, then held her in her arms as she died. Years later, when she confessed to the murder, Jane would describe the experience in chilling detail. I held her in my arms and watched with delight as she gasped her life out. This intimate connection between killer and victim would become Jane's signature, fulfilling a psychological need that normal human relationships had never satisfied. The murder of Elizabeth Bighgam marked the beginning of Jane's 6-year killing spree. Over the next several years, she would murder at least 31 people, though the true number was likely much higher. Her victims were primarily elderly patients who had requested her services as a private duty nurse, though she also killed fellow nurses, landlords, and friends who had in some way disappointed or threatened her. Jane's method was always the same. She would gain the complete trust of her victims, often becoming indispensable to their care. Then, when the opportunity arose, she would administer a lethal injection of morphine, atropene, or both. The drugs would cause the victim to slip into unconsciousness, and Jane would often climb into bed beside them, holding them as they died. This intimate ritual was central to Jane's psychological satisfaction. She later described experiencing sexual arousal during these death scenes, suggesting that the murders fulfilled both her need for control and her deeply disturbed sexual desires. The victim's final moments belonged entirely to her, giving her the complete possession of another human being that she had never achieved in normal relationships. Jane's crimes went undetected for years because of her exceptional reputation and the subtlety of her methods. Morphine and atropene poisoning could mimic natural death, especially in elderly patients who were already ill. The symptoms, gradual loss of consciousness, respiratory failure, and cardiac arrest were consistent with many natural causes of death in the era before modern forensic science. Moreover, Jane's victims were often isolated individuals who had specifically requested her services because they trusted her completely. Their deaths were mourned but not questioned as Jane had carefully cultivated an image of herself as a devoted caregiver who provided comfort in her patients final moments. The murders also served to enhance Jane's reputation in the medical community. Families who had lost loved ones under her care often praised her dedication and compassion, recommending her services to others. This created a perverse cycle where Jane's crimes actually increased her opportunities to kill. As more and more people sought out the services of the nurse who was so devoted to her patients, Jane's psychological needs extended beyond

the simple act of murder. She craved the grief and gratitude of her victim's families, positioning herself as their primary source of comfort during their time of loss. She would often attend funerals, offering condolences and support to the bererieved, all while knowing that she was responsible for their pain. This behavior reflected the complex psychological dynamics that drove Jane's crimes. She wanted to be needed, to be essential to others lives, and ultimately to have complete control over their deaths. The murders were not just acts of violence, but elaborate psychological dramas in which Jane played the central role. As Jane's confidence grew, so did her willingness to take risks. She began killing people who were not obviously ill, including younger victims who might be expected to recover from their ailments. She also started targeting people who had personal relationships with her, including fellow nurses and acquaintances who had somehow angered or disappointed her. One of her most audacious crimes was the murder of her fellow nurse and roommate, Myra Connors, in 1899. Myra had been Jane's closest friend, but their relationship had become strained over financial issues and Jane's increasingly erratic behavior. When Myra threatened to leave their shared apartment, Jane saw this as the ultimate betrayal and responded with murder. Jane's method in Myra's case was particularly callous. She gradually poisoned her roommate over several days, making it appear that Myra was suffering from a lingering illness. When Myra finally died, Jane played the role of the grieving friend, comforting others and organizing the funeral arrangements. The performance was so convincing that no one suspected her involvement. The murder of Myra Connors represented a turning point in Jane's criminal career. Previously, her victims had been primarily elderly patients who might reasonably be expected to die from natural causes. By killing a healthy young woman who was also a trained nurse, Jane had taken a significant risk. However, the crime went undetected, encouraging her to become even more brazen in her methods. Jane's final and most notorious crimes began in the summer of 1901 when she accepted a position caring for the Davis family in Katamett, Massachusetts. The family had initially hired Jane to care for Matty Davis, the wife of respected local businessman Alden Davis. However, Jane had already murdered Matty during a previous visit to Cambridge, making her services to the family unnecessary. When Jane arrived at the Davis home, she found a family in mourning, but still trusting enough to welcome her as a caregiver. Olden Davis, now a widowerower, was grateful for Jane's offer to help manage his household and care for his elderly sister, Edna, who had come to live with him after Mattiey's death. The Davis family represented everything that Jane had always wanted but never possessed. Financial security, social standing, and genuine family bonds. Rather than simply robbing them, Jane chose to insert herself into their lives as the indispensable caregiver, the person they would turn to in their time of need. Over the next few weeks, Jane systematically murdered the entire Davis family. First, she killed Alden Davis, making it appear that he had died from grief over his wife's death. Then, she murdered his sister, Ednner, who had begun to suspect that something was wrong with the family's sudden run of bad luck. Finally, she killed Olden's daughters, Minnie and Genevieve, who had come to help settle their father's affairs. Each murder followed Jane's established pattern. She would gain the complete trust of her victims, often becoming their primary caregiver and confidant. Then when they were at their most vulnerable, she would administer the lethal injection and hold them as they died. The intimacy of these final moments was crucial to Jane's psychological satisfaction, fulfilling her need for complete control over another human

being. The Davis family murders were Jane's undoing. Unlike her previous victims, who had often been isolated individuals with few relatives to ask questions, the Davis family was prominent in their community. Their rapid succession of deaths raised suspicions among neighbors and surviving family members who began to wonder if something more than bad luck was responsible for the family's tragedies. The first person to voice suspicions was Captain Paul Gibbs, Mini Davis's husband, who had been away on a sea voyage when his wife died. When he returned to find his wife dead and buried, he was devastated by his loss, but also puzzled by the circumstances. He had left behind a healthy young woman, and Jane's explanation that Minnie had died suddenly from heart failure didn't satisfy him. Captain Gibbs began asking questions about the family's recent deaths, and he quickly discovered that Jane had been present at each one. Moreover, he learned that Jane had been caring for Mattie Davis when she died in Cambridge, making her the common thread connecting all five deaths. His suspicions aroused, Captain Gibbs contacted the local authorities and demanded that they investigate the deaths. The investigation that followed was complicated by the limited forensic capabilities of the era. However, the authorities were able to exume the bodies of Mini and Genevie Davis and subject them to toxicological analysis. The results confirmed Captain Gibbs' suspicions. Both women had died from morphine poisoning administered in doses far beyond any therapeutic purpose. Armed with this evidence, the authorities obtained a warrant for Jane's arrest. On October 29th, 1901, she was taken into custody at her boarding house in Boston, charged with the murder of Minnie Davis. The arrest of the popular nurse shocked the medical community and the general public who had known Jane only as the cheerful, dedicated caregiver who had devoted her life to helping others. Initially, Jane maintained her innocence, claiming that she had done everything possible to save the Davis family and that their deaths had been as mysterious to her as they were to everyone else. However, as the evidence mounted against her, she began to realize that her position was hopeless. The toxicology reports were damning, and investigators had begun to look into other suspicious deaths connected to her career. Faced with the likelihood of execution, Jane's attorney advised her to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. This strategy required Jane to cooperate with psychiatric experts who would evaluate her mental state and determine whether she was legally responsible for her actions. During these interviews, Jane began to reveal the true extent of her crimes. The confessions that followed shocked even the experienced investigators who had been working on the case. Jane admitted to 31 murders, providing detailed accounts of how she had killed her victims, and describing the sexual satisfaction she had derived from their deaths. She told psychiatrists that her greatest ambition was to have killed more people, helpless people, than any other man or woman who ever lived. The psychiatric evaluation revealed a deeply disturbed individual who had never developed normal human attachments or moral restraints. Jane's early experiences of abandonment and abuse had left her with a personality disorder that made her incapable of genuine empathy or remorse. She saw other people primarily as objects to be manipulated for her own gratification, whether emotional, financial, or sexual. The trial of Jane Toppen began in June 1902, drawing enormous public attention. The case was one of the first to extensively use psychiatric testimony in determining criminal responsibility, making it a landmark in the development of forensic psychology. The proceedings were covered extensively by newspapers across the country with reporters fascinated by the

contrast between Jane's cheerful public persona and the horrific nature of her crimes. The prosecution argued that Jane's crimes were premeditated and that she had been fully aware of the consequences of her actions. They presented evidence of her careful planning, her knowledge of pharmarmacology, and her ability to maintain her deception over many years. The fact that she had been able to function normally in society, they argued, proved that she was legally sane and therefore responsible for her actions. The defense, led by attorney Fred Bixby, painted a different picture. They argued that Jane's traumatic childhood had left her with severe mental illness that made her incapable of distinguishing right from wrong. They presented testimony from psychiatrists who had examined Jane and concluded that she was suffering from a form of moral insanity that absolved her of legal responsibility for her crimes. The jury deliberated for just a few hours before returning a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity. The decision was controversial with many observers arguing that Jane's ability to evade detection for so long proved that she had been fully aware of the wrongness of her actions. However, the psychiatric evidence was compelling, and the jury ultimately concluded that Jane's mental illness had rendered her incapable of forming the intent necessary for criminal responsibility. Jane was committed to the Taton State Hospital for the Criminally insane, where she would spend the rest of her life. The facility was designed to house individuals who had been found not guilty by reason of insanity, providing both treatment and security to protect the public from further harm. Initially, Jane's adjustment to institutional life was difficult. She refused to eat, claiming that she was afraid the food might be poisoned, an ironic fear given her own history of poisoning others. The newspapers of the time reported this detail with obvious satisfaction, seeing it as a form of poetic justice, that Jane was now experiencing the fear that she had inflicted on so many others. However, Jane eventually adapted to her new environment, and began to participate in the hospital's programs. She worked in the hospital's sewing room, attended religious services, and even gave interviews to reporters and researchers who were interested in her case. These interviews revealed that Jane showed no genuine remorse for her crimes, often speaking about her victims with a detached curiosity that horrified listeners. In her later years, Jane became something of a celebrity within the hospital, known for her cheerful demeanor and her willingness to discuss her crimes with visitors. She seemed to enjoy the attention and continued to seek approval from others just as she had throughout her life. However, she was never able to understand why her actions had been wrong, viewing her murders as simply another way of forming intimate relationships with others. Jane Toppen died on August 17th, 1938 at the age of 84, having spent 37 years in the state hospital. Her death was barely noticed by the press as the public had long since moved on to other sensational crimes. However, her case remained significant in the fields of criminal psychology and forensic psychiatry, providing valuable insights into the mind of a serial killer. The case of Jane Toppen had a lasting impact on the medical profession and the criminal justice system. Hospitals began implementing better controls over dangerous drugs, and the nursing profession developed stricter standards for monitoring the behavior of caregivers. The case also contributed to the development of forensic psychology as a legitimate field of study, demonstrating the importance of understanding the psychological factors that drive criminal behavior. The story of Jane Toppen remains one of the most chilling examples of how a trusted caregiver can abuse their position to commit horrific crimes. Her ability to maintain a

facade of caring and compassion while systematically murdering those who trusted her most represents a profound betrayal of the fundamental human need for care and protection. The case serves as a reminder that evil can hide behind the most innocent faces and that our most basic assumptions about human nature can sometimes be tragically wrong. Thanks for watching. If you found this case fascinating, don't forget to subscribe and turn on notifications for more stories like this one.

Gesche Gottfried

Confirmed Kills: 15
Suspected: 16–18
Germany, 1813–1827

Gesche Margarethe Timm, later known as Gesche Gottfried, was born on March 6, 1785, in Bremen, a trading city on the river Weser, whose streets mixed merchant wealth with narrow alleys of working families. She came from one of those modest houses. Her parents, Johann and Gesche Timm, were hardworking but poor. They raised their daughter with the rigid discipline of the lower artisan class, where obedience was expected and affection was rationed sparingly. In that small house, the mother's sharp tongue and the father's tired silence shaped the air. Gesche grew up craving approval she rarely received.
She was considered pretty in her youth: soft-featured, blond, gentle in manner. Bremen neighbors later described her as helpful, polite, and modest. She liked sewing, housework, and the small domestic rituals others found tedious. Beneath that gentleness, however, lay a hunger for affection, a need to be liked, perhaps even admired. The desire for attention grew early, silently, as her parents favored her brother, whom they considered more promising. She did not receive the tenderness she wanted, and in that absence her nature bent inward.
Her education was minimal — basic reading, basic writing, the arithmetic needed for household life. She grew into adulthood with the narrow expectations of her class: marriage, home, respectability. Those she pursued. In 1815, she married Johann Miltenberg, a saddler. The marriage was strained from the beginning. He was weak, often ill, and struggled with debt. Gesche, by contrast, kept a tidy home and pleased neighbors with her willingness to help. Her desire for approval turned outward toward the community, and people saw her as a model Bremen wife: patient, quiet, dutiful. Some admired her; some pitied her for having to nurse a husband whose constitution never seemed strong.
The early 19th century in Bremen was marked by hardship — recent wars, hunger, economic instability. Disease moved easily through damp streets and crowded houses. Illness was common, suffering expected. In such a place, a woman devoted to caregiving could rise in social affection quickly. And caring was what Gesche offered. She tended the sick with a calm face and gentle voice. In her presence, people felt reassured.
It was in this atmosphere — of sickness, need, and a woman praised for her helpfulness — that the first quiet deaths began.

Between 1813 and 1827, Gesche Gottfried poisoned 15 people with arsenic, using a preparation known as Mäusebutter — a mixture of arsenic and animal fat commonly used to

kill rodents. She applied it to food, often spreading it on bread or stirring it into soups. The poison was slow enough to mimic illness and sudden enough to avoid suspicion, and in a time when disease was commonplace, even doctors did not question the pattern.
Her victims were those closest to her: her parents, her brother, her husband Johann Miltenberg, her children Johanna, Adelheid, Heinrich, and two infant sons. Later came friends, neighbors, and suitors. Some she poisoned over days, others over weeks. She sat beside their beds, wiping their foreheads, feeding them broth with the same hands that had prepared the poison. People said she was devoted, tireless in care. As they grew weaker, they praised her kindness.
Victim selection was personal. She killed those who displeased her, those whose illnesses made them burdensome, and those whose deaths would bring sympathy. She longed to be admired as a grieving widow, a suffering mother, a devoted friend who endured tragedy after tragedy with admirable strength. She fed on the attention. Funerals became stages for her. She wept convincingly, received visitors, accepted food, spoke of fate and sorrow. People embraced her, pitied her, admired her. Her reputation grew almost saintly. She was called the "Angel of Bremen."
Arsenic allowed her control. The symptoms — vomiting, diarrhea, fever, cramps — resembled cholera, dysentery, or one of the many illnesses that stalked the era. She escalated doses carefully, letting the sickness progress naturally before administering a final, fatal portion. In some cases, when a victim began to recover, she poisoned them again, restoring the decline.
Several murders were motivated by convenience. When she tired of her husband, she fed him poison until his body surrendered. A second marriage followed, to Michael Gottfried, a merchant who soon fell ill in her care. She poisoned him as tenderly as the others. Widowhood again brought attention, sympathy, and community affection.
What she sought was not money — though she took some inheritances — but admiration. She wanted to be seen as tragic, noble in suffering, beloved by neighbors. The more deaths surrounded her, the more attention she received. She became the center of Bremen gossip — not as a suspect, but as a victim of endless misfortune.
By the mid-1820s, however, suspicion began to stir. Too many around her had died. Too many of the sick grew worse as soon as she took over their care. Yet few dared speak doubt aloud. Her reputation protected her like armor. The Angel of Bremen — who would suspect an angel?

Gesche Gottfried's downfall began in March 1828, when one of her intended victims, a Bremen shipping clerk named Johann Rumpff, noticed a strange taste in his food. He grew suspicious, refused further meals, and alerted authorities. Investigators found traces of arsenic in the food she had prepared. Her public image cracked. She was arrested, and under questioning she eventually confessed to numerous poisonings, listing her victims with unsettling calm.
The city was shaken. Bremen, a community built on reputation and respectability, had revered her for years. The revelation that the "Angel of Bremen" had murdered her own children — and so many others — horrified the public. Crowds gathered daily outside the

jail, whispering about the polite woman who had moved among them like a quiet winter fever.
Her trial was thorough, lasting months. Witnesses described her years of caregiving, the pattern of sudden illnesses, the funerals that followed one another like tolling bells. Doctors reexamined the deaths and found the symptoms consistent with arsenic poisoning. Gesche never expressed remorse. She answered questions softly, precisely, sometimes with an air of annoyance at being misunderstood. There was no madness defense. She was judged sane, calculated, and responsible.
On April 21, 1831, she was sentenced to death. Bremen had not carried out a public execution in many years, but authorities believed her crimes demanded one. On April 21, 1831 — the same day her sentence was finalized — she was executed by sword on Bremen's Domshof square. Thousands gathered. Some came to see justice; others, to witness the fall of a woman who had fooled them all.
Her legacy lingered uneasily. Bremen preserved the sword used in her execution, later displaying it in the city museum. Her crimes became part of the city's dark folklore, a warning wrapped in a quiet story of trust betrayed. She stands as one of Europe's earliest documented female serial killers — not driven by bloodlust, but by the cold hunger for sympathy, approval, and the soft glow of admiration that surrounded her suffering.

Nannie Doss

Confirmed Kills: 11
Suspected: Up to 15
United States, 1920s–1954

Nancy Hazel, later known as Nannie Doss, was born on November 4, 1905, in Blue Mountain, Alabama, a rural and isolated town where cotton fields stretched far and thin houses creaked in the southern wind. Her family was poor, conservative, and deeply mistrustful of outsiders. Her father, James Hazel, ruled the household with harsh discipline. He forbade makeup, dresses, and public schooling past the sixth grade. Nannie and her sisters worked the fields from childhood, cutting their hands on the cotton burrs, sunburnt and silent. At age seven, during a train ride to visit relatives, Nannie hit her head on a metal bar when the train jolted to a stop. She blacked out and would suffer from severe headaches and depression for years after. Whether that injury twisted something deeper is impossible to know, but she would later refer to it with grim importance, as if it marked a before and after.
There was no affection in the Hazel home. Her mother was quiet, obedient, often ill. Her father's grip tightened as she neared adolescence. He prevented her from going to school, from socializing, and kept her from suitors. Nannie began escaping through romantic fiction — particularly the "True Romance" magazines her mother hid under the bed. Stories of gallant husbands, exotic love, and eternal happiness stirred a yearning in her, and she began to see marriage not as duty, but escape.
At sixteen, she married Charlie Braggs, a man she barely knew, chosen with her father's permission. They had four children between 1921 and 1927. Nannie's behavior became unstable: she drank, smoked, and disappeared for days. Two of their children died

mysteriously in infancy, and though the deaths were attributed to illness, rumors followed. Braggs grew suspicious and sent their surviving daughters to live with his mother — who soon died after drinking tea prepared by Nannie.
When Braggs left her in 1927, she began a lifelong pattern: marriage, disappointment, and death. She moved from state to state, meeting men through personal ads and presenting herself as a warm, loving widow searching for happiness. What the ads didn't say was that husbands who disappointed her would soon be dead.
The Great Depression shaped much of her middle years. She worked in factories, did domestic cleaning, moved often. She was small, plump, smiled easily, wore her hair curled. Neighbors liked her. She joked, baked pies, kept a tidy kitchen. Behind the charm was a woman who had tasted love, bitterness, loss — and chosen to sweeten it with poison.

Nannie Doss's known killings span from the early 1920s to 1954. She murdered at least 11 people — including four husbands, two children, two sisters, her mother, a grandson, and a mother-in-law. The true count may be higher, with several other family deaths suspected. Her weapon of choice was arsenic, occasionally mixed with rat poison or other chemicals. She administered it in food, drinks, or medicine — coffee, pie, stew, tea. Symptoms came slowly: nausea, stomach cramps, vomiting, and death within days. Often, doctors wrote off the cause as flu or food poisoning. In some cases, autopsies were not conducted at all. She would weep at funerals, cook meals for the mourners, and sometimes remarry within weeks.
What set Nannie apart was her blend of domestic charm and cold calculation. She did not kill for financial gain — although insurance money came at times — but seemingly from a twisted romantic disappointment. When a husband failed to meet her ideals, strayed from affection, or proved dull or abusive, she removed him like a soiled apron. Her fantasy of perfect love remained intact, and she simply reset the stage.
Her second husband, Frank Harrelson, was a violent alcoholic. After years of tolerating his abuse, she killed him in 1945 with rat poison mixed into his corn whiskey. The motive, she claimed, was provoked when she discovered his letters to another woman. She buried him in the yard, told neighbors he died in his sleep, and smiled as she poured coffee for the undertaker.
In 1950, she married husband number four — Richard Morton — a man she met through a lonely-hearts club. He wooed her with flowers and praise, but began seeing other women soon after the wedding. He died of poisoning within months. Just before him, her own mother, whom she'd been caring for, had died of "old age" after eating a peach pie Nannie baked.
Another chilling case was the death of her grandson, four-year-old Lee, in 1953. He had been staying with her and his grandfather, Samuel Doss, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After eating a bowl of cereal she prepared, he died within a day. The boy's death devastated his parents, but they never suspected her. She told police later, in a soft voice, that he was a "burden" at the time and had been getting in the way of her new life with her husband.
Her final victim was that husband — Samuel Doss — a clean-living, churchgoing man who disapproved of her pulp romance books and television habits. He tried to control her behavior, limit her spending, and encouraged her to live with more dignity. She fed him a mixture of prune cake and poison in 1954. He died slowly, in agony. Unlike the others, he

was examined by doctors who noted internal burns and liver damage inconsistent with natural illness. His death was not quiet.

The death of Samuel Doss triggered the first real investigation into Nannie's trail of corpses. Doctors at the Oklahoma hospital where he died were suspicious of the rapid organ failure and ordered a full autopsy. High levels of arsenic were found in his system. Police questioned Nannie at the hospital. At first she seemed confused, then amused. She denied everything with the smile of a grandmother offering pie. But when the questioning grew sharper, she began to speak — at first vaguely, then freely, almost cheerfully.
"I was looking for the perfect mate," she said. "The real romance in life." She laughed during interviews, described her methods casually, and even joked with reporters that her favorite poison was rat killer because it worked faster. She did not appear insane — only completely detached from remorse.
Nannie Doss was arrested and charged with multiple counts of murder. The press quickly dubbed her "The Giggling Granny," "The Jolly Black Widow," and "The Lonely Hearts Killer." Her smiling face, curled hair, and pleasant demeanor contrasted grotesquely with her confessions. Public fascination exploded. How could a pie-baking grandmother be a cold-blooded killer? America, already captivated by true crime, now had its own female archetype of domestic murder.
She pleaded guilty in 1955 and was sentenced to life in prison. She avoided the death penalty by cooperating with investigators and because Oklahoma did not seek capital punishment in her case. She was never tried for most of the murders, as the state had enough to keep her imprisoned indefinitely. She died of leukemia in prison on June 2, 1965, at age 59.
Her legacy remains unsettling — not only because of the number of lives she ended, but because she fit no common image of a killer. She sang hymns. She laughed in interviews. She folded laundry. She smiled as she poisoned those closest to her. Nannie Doss didn't murder in rage or desperation. She did so calmly, as if erasing flaws from a love story she had written in her mind — and re-written, again and again, in blood.

Charlene Gallego

Confirmed Kills: 10
United States, 1978–1980

Charlene Adell Williams was born on October 10, 1956, in Sacramento, California. Her upbringing took place in a home of comfort and conventional values. Her father was a successful businessman, and the family was financially secure, even privileged by the standards of the time. She was described by teachers and neighbors as a quiet, intelligent child, with a strong interest in reading and music. By the time she reached high school, she was fluent in classical piano and scored above average on academic assessments.
But Charlene's personal life became increasingly unstable as she entered adulthood. She married for the first time at a very young age, and the union dissolved quickly. A second marriage followed and failed again. In each case, friends noted her emotional swings and a growing tendency to withdraw socially. She began using drugs, had brushes with the law for

minor offenses, and drifted in and out of jobs, seemingly unsure of herself but craving someone to guide her.
In 1977, she met Gerald Armond Gallego at a casino in Reno. Gerald was a decade older, charismatic in public, but known for controlling behavior and a long history of criminal activity. He had already spent time in prison and had a pattern of violent conduct. Charlene, at this point seeking direction and identity, was quickly drawn into his world. What followed was a relationship built not on partnership, but on control, influence, and shared acts of severe criminality. In less than three years, the pair became responsible for one of the most disturbing sequences of abductions and killings carried out by a couple in U.S. criminal history.

Between 1978 and 1980, Charlene and Gerald Gallego were responsible for a series of abductions and killings involving at least ten known victims. Their pattern was deliberate and repeated: targeting teenage girls and young women, often in public spaces, luring them into a van with false pretenses, then driving them to isolated locations. Charlene often acted as the one who approached the victims, using a calm and friendly manner to gain trust.
Once the victims were in the vehicle, they were overpowered and taken to remote areas. The assaults and killings followed. In some cases, the pair kept the victims for hours or longer before killing them. The method of killing varied between shootings and other forms of asphyxiation, depending on circumstances. Charlene's participation was largely focused on assisting Gerald by organizing the abductions, driving, procuring supplies, and sometimes helping control the victims. She later claimed she feared for her life and acted under duress, but the evidence showed a consistent pattern of her involvement that suggested more than fear — it revealed complicity.
Victims included Rhonda Scheffler and Kippi Vaught, both teenagers taken from a mall; Linda Aguilar, who was pregnant at the time she disappeared; and Brenda Judd and Sandra Colley, two teenagers last seen near a fairground. One of the final incidents, involving Craig Miller and Mary Sowers, occurred in public with witnesses nearby, which ultimately led to the couple's identification. The pair left behind a trail of trauma across multiple states.
What was unusual about Charlene's role was her ability to move between identities — a refined, educated woman to outsiders, yet fully involved in these hidden crimes. She later described herself as someone trapped, yet her consistent and active presence, even in the planning stages, told a more troubling story.

The arrest came in 1980, after a witness managed to record a partial license plate during the public abduction of Craig Miller and Mary Sowers in Sacramento. Police traced the vehicle and began surveillance. Charlene and Gerald had already fled but were soon located in Nevada. They were taken into custody without resistance.
Faced with overwhelming evidence, Charlene agreed to cooperate with authorities in exchange for reduced charges. She provided detailed testimony about each of the killings, giving prosecutors the timeline and sequence of events needed to convict Gerald. In return, Charlene was allowed to plead guilty to lesser charges and received a sentence of 16 years and 8 months.

Gerald Gallego was convicted of multiple murders and sentenced to death in both California and Nevada. He died of cancer in 2002 while awaiting execution. Charlene served her full sentence and was released from prison in 1997. She legally changed her name and has lived in obscurity ever since, with no public interviews or disclosures.
The Gallego case remains one of the most notorious examples of criminal collusion between romantic partners. It reshaped the understanding of how influence, control, and psychological dependence can lead to shared acts of extreme violence. The role Charlene played — as both participant and enabler — has continued to fuel debate about coercion, agency, and responsibility in criminal partnerships.

Lydia Sherman

Confirmed Kills: 10
Suspected: 11
United States, 1863–1871

Lydia Danbury was born in 1824 in Burlington, New Jersey, and raised in modest surroundings by a deeply religious aunt after the early death of her parents. The strict moral structure of her upbringing left her with few tools to navigate the chaos of adult life. She was taught obedience, piety, and the importance of maintaining a household — lessons she would later echo in court, though warped through her own experience.
In her early twenties, she married Edward Struck, a railroad mechanic in New York City. Their marriage produced six children. At first, Lydia lived what appeared to be the life of a conventional working-class wife: cleaning, cooking, and raising children in the shadows of soot-covered tenements. But Edward soon fell into depression and lost his job. Their financial situation deteriorated. Lydia, left to manage both a crumbling household and a mentally ill husband, began seeking escape not through divorce or abandonment — but through death. Her descent began quietly, with a single bottle of arsenic.

Between 1863 and 1871, Lydia Sherman poisoned three husbands and at least seven children — six of her own and one stepchild — using arsenic. Her method was methodical and undramatic. She laced food or drink with small quantities of the poison over time, prolonging the illness to avoid suspicion. In some cases, the poison was administered over weeks. In others, she acted more quickly. She never struck, shouted, or used force. She cooked and cleaned while they withered.
Her first known victim was Edward Struck, who had become bedridden from what was described as melancholia. Lydia fed him arsenic in small doses until he died in 1864. She told neighbors he had passed from typhoid. Shortly after, she poisoned her three youngest children, claiming she could not support them alone. They died quietly, with barely a doctor's visit. She moved towns.

Her second husband, Dennis Hurlburt, was a farmer from Connecticut. They married in 1866. He died the following year after a short illness, which she blamed on dysentery. No one questioned the death. The pattern repeated with her third husband, Horatio Sherman, and his

young daughter. Lydia appeared composed at every funeral. Her mourning clothes were pressed and her demeanor calm. No one suspected the woman who read her Bible each morning, tended gardens, and sang lullabies.
She moved often, remarrying quickly, presenting herself as a modest widow who had endured great sorrow. Each new household gave her fresh victims, and each new death appeared to the world as tragic misfortune. She was careful, slow, and efficient — always striking within the domestic sphere, always under the roof where she cleaned and served.

Her undoing came not from suspicion, but from routine inquiry. In 1871, a pharmacist in Stratford, Connecticut, reported that Lydia had purchased a large quantity of arsenic, claiming it was for rats. Shortly after, her husband Horatio Sherman died under sudden circumstances. Authorities ordered an autopsy, which revealed arsenic in his stomach. By this time, Lydia had already fled town.
She was arrested weeks later in New Jersey, living under a false name. During interrogation, she confessed to ten murders in chilling detail, naming each victim, the dosage used, and her motives — which ranged from desperation to the desire for a "quiet home." She spoke in calm, unhurried tones. Her justification was framed in language of burden and weariness. She said she "couldn't see them suffer," though it was she who had delivered the suffering.
The trial in 1872 drew national attention. She was dubbed "The Derby Poisoner" and "Connecticut's Borgia" by the press. Courtrooms filled with spectators eager to see the face of a woman who had killed her own children with the same hands that dressed them for school. Lydia showed little emotion during the proceedings. She neither wept nor begged. She was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.
She served her sentence at Wethersfield State Prison in Connecticut. In 1878, she escaped briefly but was recaptured within weeks. Her health declined in custody, and she died in 1878 at age 54 from cancer. Her death was quiet. Few marked it.
Lydia Sherman remains one of the earliest recorded female serial killers in American history. Her crimes, unfolding in kitchens and bedrooms, contradicted the popular image of women as naturally nurturing. She did not kill out of sudden rage, nor for financial gain in the conventional sense. Her motives were laced with resentment, exhaustion, and the belief that death solved problems no one else would fix.
She is rarely mentioned in modern accounts, yet her case remains one of the most quietly disturbing in 19th-century crime — not for the scale of her violence, but for how quietly she lived while carrying it out.

Dagmar Overbye

Confirmed Kills: 9
Suspected: Up to 25
Denmark, 1913–1920

Dagmar Johanne Amalie Overbye was born on April 23, 1883, in the rural village of Assendrup near Horsens, Denmark. Her early years unfolded in a time of high infant mortality, deep poverty, and shifting moral codes in a rapidly industrializing nation. Little is

known of her childhood with certainty, but later testimony and court records suggest a bleak upbringing filled with instability, detachment, and absence of tenderness. Those who knew her described her as distant and unemotional, with an uncanny ability to perform whatever social role was required of her — when she chose to.
As a young adult, Dagmar worked as a maid, moved between temporary lodgings, and lived a solitary life. She gave birth to several children, but many of them died in infancy or were given up to institutions. In 1916, she gave birth to a child that she later killed — an act that would set the template for what followed.
In the years that followed World War I, Danish cities were gripped by economic uncertainty and high levels of social shame around illegitimacy. For poor, unmarried women who became pregnant, options were scarce. Public orphanages were overcrowded. Adoption was largely unregulated. It was in this shadowed corner of society that Dagmar Overbye carved her role: she offered to take in unwanted babies for a fee, promising care or placement with childless couples. She advertised in newspapers, corresponded by mail, and presented herself as a respectable matron able to "solve a problem."
The infants disappeared. No one looked closely — not yet.

Between 1913 and 1920, Dagmar Overbye killed at least nine infants entrusted to her care — and likely many more. She used several methods: strangulation, drowning, burning, or leaving the children to perish through neglect. Often she disposed of the bodies in stoves, buried them in shallow graves, or left them in crevices near cemeteries or parks. Many of her victims were never identified, and several were killed within days or even hours of being handed over.
Her killings were not erratic but systematic. She operated from her residence in Copenhagen, sometimes under the guise of being a midwife or foster mother. The mothers — often unmarried and under immense social pressure — paid her modest fees, believing their children would be adopted or raised with care. She promised to spare them disgrace, to ensure the child a future, and to make the process discrete. After the exchange, the mothers left, often never contacting her again.
She kept records in notebooks: names, dates, fees collected. But the infants were not transferred anywhere. They vanished into her rooms.
Her motives blended profit and apathy. She had no evident financial ambition beyond minimal living costs. There were no signs of sadism or rage. Instead, the killings were carried out with a mechanical detachment, as if they were an unpleasant but necessary part of the service she offered. In rare cases where the mothers returned or asked questions, she claimed the child had been adopted or died of illness.
Dagmar's operation went unchallenged for years. Denmark's social systems, overburdened and reluctant to interfere in private arrangements involving shameful pregnancies, allowed her to function in near-total invisibility. It wasn't until 1920, when one mother grew suspicious and reported her to police, that the veil began to lift.

The mother who unraveled the case had given her child to Dagmar and later returned seeking news. She received evasive answers and, disturbed by Dagmar's demeanor, reported her to police. The ensuing investigation was unprecedented in Danish legal history. Police

unearthed evidence of multiple infant deaths, including burned remains, bones hidden in stoves, and buried cloth bundles in nearby fields.
Dagmar confessed with minimal resistance, calmly listing the details of her killings. She admitted to murdering at least nine babies but hinted that the real number was higher. In court, she showed no visible remorse, no nervousness. Medical experts declared her sane. The prosecution portrayed her as cold-blooded and methodical, a woman who had turned infant killing into a routine.
In 1921, she was convicted of nine counts of murder. She received the death sentence, one of the last ever passed in Denmark, though it was later commuted to life in prison. She died in 1929 at a women's prison in Horsens.
The public reaction to the Overbye case was one of horror and shame. Her crimes exposed the cracks in Denmark's social welfare system — the absence of oversight, the cruelty faced by unwed mothers, and the dangers of unchecked private arrangements for child placement. As a result of her case, Denmark introduced sweeping reforms to the adoption and foster care systems, creating regulations and institutions to oversee child welfare in ways that had never existed before.
Dagmar Overbye remains one of the most infamous women in Danish criminal history. She is still remembered as a woman who turned society's silence — around poverty, pregnancy, and shame — into a weapon. Unlike many serial killers, her face was not cruel, her manner not vicious. She killed without visible hatred, only indifference.

Magdalena Solís

Confirmed Kills: 8
Suspected: Up to 15
Mexico, 1963

Magdalena Solís was born in 1947 in Tamaulipas, Mexico, into a life of poverty and instability. Her early years are sparsely documented, but what is known paints a grim picture. Raised in an environment saturated with crime and exploitation, she grew up in a family with known involvement in prostitution and petty criminal activity. There was no formal education, no stable home, and no real intervention to shift her course. By adolescence, she had already been exposed to human trafficking networks and spent time in the custody of men who treated her as property.
She fell under the influence of her brother, Eleazar Solís, a small-time criminal who later played a central role in her descent into cult leadership. Through him, Magdalena was introduced to the Hernández brothers — Santos and Cayetano — a pair of conmen who posed as prophets in rural northern Mexico. These men preyed upon impoverished villagers in San Luis Potosí, claiming to be messengers of ancient deities and promising wealth and power to those who followed them. They built a makeshift cult around Aztec mythology, combining superstition, fear, and manipulation.
Magdalena was brought into this cult initially as part of a ruse: she was presented as a reincarnated goddess — the embodiment of an ancient Aztec deity. At first, this role was meant to deceive the villagers. But it did not remain a performance. Over time, Magdalena

began to believe in the identity given to her. Her behavior shifted. What began as fraud turned into faith — or madness. The villagers, desperate and uneducated, began to worship her. Her authority became absolute, and she wielded it with increasing violence.

In early 1963, Magdalena Solís declared herself a living goddess and took full control of the cult. Under her influence, the group abandoned mere ritual and descended into cruelty masked as ceremony. What followed was a brief but horrifying reign of torture and human sacrifice in the village of Yerba Buena.
The cult's victims were usually members who began to doubt Magdalena's divinity or attempted to leave. These individuals were accused of betrayal and were chosen for sacrifice. The killings were carried out in what the group called "cleansings," rituals that included prolonged torture, mutilation, and eventual death. The victims were often beaten, burned, and bled — their deaths framed as sacred offerings. Magdalena insisted the blood be consumed by the group during these rituals, turning the gatherings into acts of communal brutality.
Eight confirmed deaths were recorded, but officials believed the number may have been higher. Several villagers went missing during this period, and due to the remoteness and isolation of the location, many deaths likely went unreported or undiscovered. Magdalena reinforced the cult's loyalty through a mix of fear, punishment, and a delusional belief in her own supernatural status. She demanded absolute obedience. The Hernández brothers, originally the leaders, became her followers, and eventually victims themselves.
The murders remained hidden until a 14-year-old boy named Sebastián Guerrero witnessed one of the rituals while exploring near the cult's hut. He escaped and alerted local authorities. What the police discovered upon raiding the area shocked even hardened investigators: altars soaked with blood, the remains of sacrificed individuals, and villagers in a trance-like state, convinced they were following a deity. Magdalena was arrested without resistance, still speaking in the language of prophecy and divine right.

Magdalena Solís was taken into custody in May 1963. The survivors from the cult were dazed and malnourished, many of them unable to explain what had happened beyond murmurs of gods and visions. Authorities charged her with multiple counts of murder, torture, and coercion. Her brother Eleazar and other cult members were also arrested and faced similar charges.
During interrogation, Magdalena showed no remorse. She spoke calmly of her role as a divine vessel, described the rituals as necessary, and stated that her actions had been for the "cleansing" of unbelievers. Psychiatrists who evaluated her during the proceedings concluded that she suffered from a severe delusional disorder — possibly paranoid schizophrenia compounded by years of abuse and trauma — though she was declared fit for trial.
She was convicted on multiple charges and sentenced to 50 years in prison, a rare outcome at the time for a female offender of such brutal acts in Mexico. Her brother received a similar sentence. The cult collapsed entirely after her arrest. Survivors returned to families or were relocated, but the psychological damage remained visible in the village for decades.
The case of Magdalena Solís remains one of the darkest and most obscure episodes in the history of female serial killers. Unlike others who killed quietly or for personal gain, her crimes were enacted under a veil of delusion, spiritual manipulation, and mass belief. She

combined the theatrical power of cult leadership with direct violence, leaving behind a legacy that still chills criminologists and historians.
She has rarely been interviewed and has remained out of public view since her incarceration. There is no known record of her release. Whether she is alive today is uncertain. The village of Yerba Buena remains, but its name is now associated with a past it never speaks of.

Amelia Dyer

Confirmed Kills: 7
Suspected: 200–400+
United Kingdom, 1869–1896

Amelia Elizabeth Hobley was born in 1837 in the small village of Pyle Marsh, near Bristol, England. She was the youngest of five children in a working-class family. Her father, Samuel Hobley, was a master shoemaker — respectable but modest — and her early years were shaped by the rigid social codes of Victorian England, where reputation meant everything and women had few rights beyond their usefulness in marriage or domestic labor.
From an early age, Amelia showed intelligence and discipline. She learned to read and write, an uncommon privilege for girls in her class, and developed a calm, obedient demeanor. But her childhood was not free of darkness. Her mother suffered from severe mental illness, likely brought on by typhus. Amelia witnessed fits of violence and hallucination, and she often had to care for her mother during these episodes. When her mother died, Amelia was sent to live with an aunt. The trauma of those early experiences would never leave her, though she rarely spoke of them.
After her father's death, Amelia lost financial stability. She briefly trained as a nurse, earning a license in a Bristol hospital, but the work was grueling and the pay poor. She married George Thomas, a man nearly 35 years her senior, and assumed his surname. George encouraged her to run a small business, and when he died in 1869, she was left with no income and a newborn daughter. It was then that Amelia began what would become one of the most horrifying careers in British criminal history.
The Victorian era was plagued by poverty and social hypocrisy. Unwed mothers were ostracized, often forced to abandon their infants or give them up to “baby farmers” — women who, for a fee, took infants under the promise of adoption or care. Many of these women operated legally in the grey zones of law, and most were unregulated. Amelia Dyer saw an opportunity in this moral shadowland. She began taking in babies for a price. What followed was not care, but mass infanticide.

Amelia Dyer’s criminal enterprise spanned nearly three decades. She placed discreet ads in newspapers: “Married couple with no family would adopt healthy child, nice country home. Terms £10.” Desperate mothers — often servants or unmarried girls ruined by social scandal — responded. They paid her to care for the child, believing it would be safe, adopted, or at least raised better than they could manage. What they did not know was that within hours or days, Amelia was murdering the babies.

She did not use poison, nor did she allow slow neglect. Her method was direct. At first, she let the infants die of starvation or overdose from laudanum (a common opiate-based sedative given to infants to keep them quiet). Later, to avoid suspicion and the slow decay of corpses in her care, she began strangling the infants with white tape — her trademark.
Once the babies were dead, she wrapped them in old fabrics or newspaper and disposed of them in rivers, shallow graves, or hidden cellars. She moved frequently, changing names and towns, to stay ahead of law enforcement. At one point, she adopted aliases like Mrs. Harding or Mrs. Thomas and presented herself as a respectable widow. She operated in Reading, Bristol, London, and surrounding counties. Always polite, always composed.
Records suggest she may have killed over 200 infants — perhaps even more. At the peak of her crimes, she was taking in multiple babies per week. She kept no written ledgers, no records, no names. Each child vanished into silence.
What makes her story particularly grotesque is the calm efficiency of her process. There was no frenzy, no emotional breakdown. This was routine. She would collect the child, sometimes soothe the crying with laudanum, then strangle it with tape. “You find a tape around the neck,” she would later confess, “and you know it’s mine.”
In 1879, she was arrested after the suspicious death of a baby in her care. She was sentenced to six months of hard labor — not for murder, but for neglect. After her release, she resumed her trade with even greater secrecy. To avoid medical inspections and paperwork, she stopped registering births and began disposing of bodies more discreetly.
One of her last victims was Doris Marmon, a baby taken from a young single mother named Evelina. Amelia promised to care for the child but strangled her within hours of arriving home. Doris’s tiny body was later found floating in the Thames — wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. It was the clue that led to Amelia’s downfall.

In March 1896, a package was found floating in the Thames near Reading. Inside was the body of an infant girl — strangled with white tape and wrapped in paper bearing a faint address. The police traced the paper to Amelia Dyer, operating under the alias “Mrs. Thomas.” They placed her under surveillance, and what they saw was chilling: a parade of women arriving with infants and leaving alone.
Authorities raided her home on April 3, 1896. The smell of decomposition clung to the walls. They found baby clothes, letters from desperate mothers, adoption receipts, and bundles of white tape. No bodies remained — she had just removed several from the house. But her ledger of deception had slipped. Detectives dredged the Thames and found multiple infant corpses, each bearing signs of Dyer’s signature tape.
She was arrested and charged with murder. In custody, she confessed calmly to the killings, showing no signs of guilt. “I used to like babies,” she said, “but that passed long ago.” The trial began on May 22, 1896, and lasted only four days. She was charged with the murder of Doris Marmon, though authorities suspected many more. The jury took less than five minutes to reach a guilty verdict.
On June 10, 1896, Amelia Dyer was executed by hanging at Newgate Prison. She stood at the gallows without resistance, showing neither fear nor remorse. She left behind a trail of nameless graves and heartbroken mothers who never found their children.

Her case led to widespread reform. The scandal shocked Victorian society, and the government tightened adoption and foster care laws. The slow shift toward regulating child welfare in Britain can be traced directly to the horror of Amelia Dyer's crimes.
She remains one of the most prolific serial killers in British history — not out of rage, or madness, but cold profit and ease. Her victims had no voice, no defense, no gravestones. For decades, she moved through city streets with a soft smile, a laced collar, and death in her handbag.

Aileen Wuornos

Confirmed Kills: 7
Suspected: Up to 10
United States, 1989–1990

Aileen Carol Wuornos was born on February 29, 1956, in Rochester, Michigan. Her upbringing was marked by separation and instability from the outset. Her father was incarcerated before her birth and died by suicide in prison. Her mother abandoned the family when Aileen was an infant, leaving her and her brother Keith in the care of their maternal grandparents. They adopted the children, giving Aileen her surname, Wuornos.
She described her childhood home as abusive. She was expelled from her household in her early teens and spent much of her adolescence living in abandoned structures or outdoors. She became involved in survival sex work before the age of fifteen and dropped out of school. During her early years, she had multiple run-ins with law enforcement over theft and assault.
In her twenties, Aileen traveled across the country, often living transiently and continuing sex work to support herself. By the mid-1980s, she had arrived in Florida. There she met Tyria Moore, a hotel worker, and they began a long-term relationship. Aileen provided for both of them through her work, and they moved frequently between motels. Their partnership lasted several years and would become a central element in the investigation that followed.

Between December 1989 and late 1990, Aileen Wuornos killed seven adult men in central Florida. Each victim had encountered her while she was hitchhiking or working roadside. The deaths occurred in various counties but followed a comparable pattern. All involved use of a small-caliber firearm. In each case, Aileen took items from the victims, such as vehicles or belongings.
The names of the victims include Richard Mallory, David Spears, Charles Carskaddon, Troy Burress, Charles Humphreys, Peter Siems (whose remains were never recovered), and Walter Gino Antonio. The occupations of these men varied, including a store owner, a trucker, and a former law enforcement officer. All were traveling alone.
Wuornos later claimed she acted in self-defense in each case, alleging that the men had threatened or assaulted her. Authorities, however, viewed the acts as premeditated and linked the pattern to robbery. She frequently sold the victims' property at local shops or abandoned their vehicles in neighboring states. Witness reports, pawn records, and physical evidence eventually connected the scenes.

Tyria Moore was not present during any of the killings but was in close proximity during the timeframe. Their travel patterns and financial dependence on the victims' stolen property became central in the investigation.

Wuornos was arrested on January 9, 1991, at a bar in Volusia County. Investigators had connected her to pawned items belonging to the victims. Tyria Moore, who had returned to Ohio, agreed to assist law enforcement in exchange for immunity. She made several recorded phone calls urging Wuornos to confess. In one of these, Wuornos agreed to take responsibility and protect Moore from prosecution.

In taped interviews, Wuornos admitted to the killings and maintained that each was committed in self-defense. She stated that her actions were responses to threats during encounters, and that she acted alone in each case. The prosecution charged her with multiple counts of murder, beginning with the case of Richard Mallory.

At trial, the court admitted testimony related to all seven cases. Her defense attorneys presented information about her mental health, including a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, but did not succeed in reducing her culpability. She was found guilty and sentenced to death in 1992. Over the next year, she received additional death sentences in related cases.

Wuornos remained on death row for over a decade. Her case attracted media attention both nationally and internationally, inspiring documentaries, books, and the 2003 feature film *Monster*. Public opinion remained divided. Some viewed her as a predatory offender; others emphasized her history of abuse and survival-driven life.

In her final years, Wuornos made multiple statements indicating that she wished to proceed with her execution. She was executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2002. Her final words included references to returning in another form.

Today, her case is studied in both criminology and media ethics due to the extensive coverage and the questions raised about trauma, justice, and female criminality. Aileen Wuornos remains one of the few American female serial killers executed in the modern era, and her life continues to provoke discussion in legal, academic, and popular contexts.

Velma Barfield

Confirmed Kills: 6
Suspected: Up to 10
United States, 1971–1978

Margie Velma Bullard was born on October 29, 1932, in South Carolina, and raised in a small, rural household in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Her father, Murphy Bullard, was a strict and controlling man. Velma would later allege he physically abused her, and that her mother, Lillian, turned a blind eye. Whether this was true or not, Velma's early life was defined by silence, discipline, and an undercurrent of dread that simmered beneath her family’s church-going façade.

She married Thomas Burke in her late teens and had two children. For a time, they lived a modest, quiet life. But the stability didn’t last. Velma developed chronic health issues, underwent a hysterectomy in her thirties, and grew dependent on prescription drugs to cope

with pain and emotional stress. She developed an addiction to tranquilizers and sedatives, which deepened after Burke began drinking heavily and losing jobs. Their marriage deteriorated under the weight of his alcoholism and her erratic moods. In 1969, Burke died in a house fire under suspicious circumstances. Though it was initially deemed accidental, later events would cast doubt.

After her husband's death, Velma's pattern of forming relationships with older, ill, or vulnerable individuals accelerated. She took jobs as a caretaker, nurse's aide, or live-in housekeeper — often placing herself in positions of intimate trust. Friends and neighbors described her as helpful and religious, frequently citing her attendance at local revivals and her habit of quoting scripture. But she was also known to be manipulative, prone to bursts of self-pity and sudden withdrawal. When money was missing or strange behavior occurred, Velma often had an explanation — and if that failed, she played ill, fainted, or shifted blame.

Her addiction worsened in the 1970s. She began forging checks, stealing from employers, and taking increasing amounts of sedatives. She kept a quiet, poised exterior in public, but the inside of her life had become hollow — full of pills, secrets, and mounting debts. Between 1971 and 1978, the people around her began dying one by one. Only later would the pattern become clear.

Velma Barfield's crimes spanned seven years and included at least six confirmed victims — all poisoned with arsenic or similar compounds. She mixed the poison into food or beverages, typically prepared for elderly or ill individuals under her care. Some were family members. Others were employers. In each case, the deaths were initially mistaken for illness, and in several, Velma stood to benefit financially or to conceal her thefts.

Her victims included:

1. Thomas Burke – her first husband, died in a fire in 1969. Not officially ruled a homicide, but Velma later implied involvement.
2. Dolly Edwards – her second husband's mother. Velma lived with her and cared for her until she died suddenly in 1977.
3. Jennie Lee Burke – her own mother, who died just days after showing symptoms of vomiting and severe gastrointestinal distress.
4. Lillian Bullard – Velma's mother-in-law, another case of rapid decline and unexpected death under Velma's care.
5. Stuart Taylor – her fiancé. When he discovered checks she had forged from his account, he became ill days later and died.
6. Record Lee – an elderly woman Velma was paid to care for, whose symptoms mirrored those of her other victims.

Each poisoning was quiet. Velma would prepare meals, administer medications, or serve tea laced with arsenic. The victims suffered stomach pain, vomiting, and eventual collapse. In most cases, no autopsy was performed, especially when the deceased were elderly or already in fragile health. Velma appeared at their funerals in black, clutching a Bible, giving short statements about "God's will."

She acted not out of impulse, but with patience. Her motive varied — in some cases, it was to cover up theft or forgery. In others, it appeared to be driven by resentment or a need for

control. There was never a violent scene or a visible confrontation. Her method relied entirely on proximity, trust, and the invisibility of poison. She was never in a hurry.
But her last victim — Stuart Taylor — did not go unnoticed.

In February 1978, Stuart Taylor died suddenly after complaining of stomach pain. He had recently discovered that Velma had forged several checks in his name and had confronted her. His autopsy, unlike those of her earlier victims, revealed traces of arsenic. Authorities reopened previous cases and quickly noticed a disturbing trend: the people who lived or relied closely on Velma often died shortly after financial disputes, health complaints, or personal arguments.
Velma was arrested later that year. During her interrogation, she broke down quickly, admitting to multiple poisonings. She stated she hadn't meant to kill anyone, only to make them ill or unconscious so she could escape consequences. But her confessions, forensic evidence, and the timeline of deaths made her one of the most prolific female serial killers in North Carolina's history.
Her trial in 1978 drew national attention. She was charged with the murder of Stuart Taylor and was convicted after a short but high-profile case. Her history of fraud, addiction, and other deaths became part of the courtroom record. She was sentenced to death.
On death row, Velma Barfield underwent a personal transformation. She embraced evangelical Christianity, read scripture daily, and became a figure of interest to religious activists, including televangelist groups and conservative ministers. They argued that she had reformed and should be spared. Appeals were filed, and her execution was delayed multiple times. Ultimately, the courts upheld her sentence.
On November 2, 1984, Velma Barfield was executed by lethal injection at Central Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina — the first woman to be executed in the United States after the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. She was 52 years old.
Her case has since been analyzed in studies on women who kill, particularly those in caregiving roles. She is frequently cited in discussions of so-called "quiet killers" — individuals who murder without weapons, violence, or visible rage. Velma never raised her voice or struck a blow. She simply watched as the people closest to her faded, one by one.
Her legacy remains divisive. Some remember her as a cold manipulator who hid behind religion. Others see her as a tragic figure destroyed by addiction, abuse, and self-loathing. Either way, her crimes left a trail of quiet devastation across rural North Carolina that still resonates decades later.

Amy Archer-Gilligan

Confirmed Kills: 5
Suspected: Up to 20+
United States, 1907–1917

Amy E. Duggan was born on October 31, 1868, in Milton, Connecticut, into a working-class family with limited means and few prospects for upward mobility. Her early life was not marked by notoriety or violence. Instead, it was shaped by the quiet struggle of rural New

England in the late 19th century. From a young age, she worked jobs typical for girls in her community, including domestic service and care work. She was known for being practical, determined, and eager for financial stability — a trait that would grow into something far more dangerous.

In 1897, she married James Archer. The couple moved to Newington, Connecticut, where they opened a small boarding home for elderly clients who needed long-term care. At first, the operation appeared legitimate. Amy had a talent for appearing compassionate, reliable, and pious. She attended church regularly, spoke in a soft voice, and maintained an image of moral propriety. Her business model was simple: she cared for elderly residents in exchange for steady payments.

The boarding home prospered. James, however, did not. He died in 1910. Amy attributed his death to kidney failure, but local whispers pointed to the suddenness of his illness and the fact that Amy benefited financially through insurance and full ownership of the business. She wasted no time expanding her enterprise. In 1907, she had already taken over another facility — the Archer Home for Elderly People and Chronic Invalids — a large Victorian-style residence in Windsor, Connecticut.

Her second marriage, to Michael Gilligan, was equally short-lived. He died after just three months under her roof. Again, she profited: this time through a will that left everything to her.

Amy's reputation as a caregiver grew even as the body count inside her home began to rise. Families trusted her. Doctors respected her. Clergy praised her devotion. But behind the lace curtains and polite smiles, the Archer Home was beginning to fill with funerals that came too close together — all of them signed off as "heart failure" or "old age." The residents were disappearing, and Amy's accounts were swelling.

Between 1907 and 1917, the Archer Home recorded an unusually high number of resident deaths. The official count sits at five confirmed victims, but historians and investigators estimate that the true number may have been twenty or more. The pattern was unmistakable: residents arrived with moderate ailments, lived briefly under Amy's supervision, then died abruptly while she remained the sole beneficiary of their financial arrangements.

Amy's method relied on a mixture of poisoning and paperwork. She used arsenic or strychnine — both easily obtainable through local pharmacies at the time — to induce sudden decline in health. The symptoms of these poisons, especially in elderly people, mimicked natural causes well enough to escape scrutiny. The residents weakened rapidly, and when death followed, Amy calmly summoned the doctor, who typically trusted her assessment. Certificates were signed, burials arranged, and personal effects quietly transferred.

Her operational approach had a financial base. She frequently persuaded residents to sign new wills leaving their possessions to her. Some paid large sums upfront for "lifetime care," only to die weeks later. Others handed over bank accounts, funeral expenses, or property deeds. Amy's demeanor — steady, religious, maternal — made these transfers seem almost charitable. She told families that their loved ones were in good hands. Her promises often ended at the graveside.

Her victims were not limited to the infirm. In at least one case, a healthy individual who had come to live with her for companionship rather than medical need died suddenly, raising

suspicions. Local gossip began to circulate that too many coffins were leaving the Archer Home. The Windsor police took note. So did newspapers. When a young relative of one victim, frustrated by evasive answers about the death, demanded an investigation, the pressure finally turned public.
In 1916, the town clerk noticed a dramatic spike in arsenic purchases and a correlation with deaths at the Archer Home. Combined with the complaints of concerned families, it was enough for the state's attorney to act.

The investigation into Amy Archer-Gilligan began formally in 1916. Exhumed bodies revealed traces of poison. The testimony of townspeople painted a picture of a caregiver who gained wealth every time a resident died. A chemist confirmed that the arsenic levels in several victims were far too high to be accidental. Amy was arrested that same year and charged with multiple counts of murder and fraud.
Her trial, held in 1917, attracted national attention. The press dubbed her "The Angel of Death" and "Sister Amy." She appeared in court wearing dark dresses, speaking politely, casting herself as a misunderstood widow overwhelmed by responsibility. Her defense argued that many residents had died from natural causes, citing age and chronic illness. But the prosecution's evidence — forged wills, sudden wealth, altered financial documents, and chemical proof of poisoning — undercut every claim.
She was convicted of first-degree murder for the death of Franklin R. Andrews, a healthy man who collapsed suddenly after Amy encouraged him to loan her money. His body showed unmistakable signs of arsenic exposure. Amy received a death sentence, later reduced to life imprisonment after a successful appeal based on mental health concerns.
In 1924, she was declared insane and transferred to Connecticut's Central State Hospital, where she remained until her death in 1962. She spent nearly half a century behind institutional walls, rarely speaking, maintaining a serene exterior that belied the devastation she left behind.
Her legacy remains a stark reminder of early 20th-century exploitation within unregulated elder care. The Archer Home became a case study in how vulnerable populations can be targeted by individuals who exploit trust, faith, and authority. Her crimes led indirectly to growing scrutiny of private care homes and stricter oversight of medical certifications.
Amy Archer-Gilligan stands as one of America's earliest and most chilling examples of a female caregiver who manipulated paperwork, relationships, and illness to quietly take lives for profit. The house in Windsor where she operated still exists, long since converted into apartments — a silent structure with a history that lingers in the shadows of its old rooms.

Kristen Gilbert

Confirmed Kills: 4
Suspected: Up to 80
United States, 1995–1996

Kristen Heather Strickland was born on November 13, 1967, in Fall River, Massachusetts, a city historically shadowed by textile decline and the lingering mythos of Lizzie Borden. She

was raised in a stable, middle-class household. Her father worked as an electronics executive and her mother was a part-time teacher. From the outside, it was an orderly life, built on school events, suburban habits, and parental pride. But behind the polished exterior, Kristen carried a manipulative streak that revealed itself early and often.

At age seven, she was already telling lies to classmates to attract attention — claiming strange illnesses, injuries, and dramatic events that had never occurred. By adolescence, these falsehoods grew more elaborate. Teachers noted her intelligence, but also her need for control and a tendency to create crises for sympathy. In high school, she was known to feign illness or emotional collapse when social bonds frayed. At least one suicide attempt was documented, but never clarified. She moved through friendships as a performance, each relationship marked by instability and emotional games.

After graduating, she pursued nursing — a field that combined intellectual rigor, intimate control, and the trust of vulnerable people. She studied at Greenfield Community College and completed her nursing training in the late 1980s. Those who knew her described her as competent, efficient, and assertive. Patients often praised her bedside manner. Yet among colleagues, whispers grew about her love of crisis. She volunteered for the most intense units, welcomed emergencies, and seemed almost energized by death.

She married James Gilbert, had children, and for a time appeared to live the suburban life she was raised for. But that mask began to slip when she joined the staff at the Northampton Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Leeds, Massachusetts. The hospital was understaffed, emotionally heavy, and often chaotic — the perfect place for someone who wanted to move unseen while holding power over life and death.

Kristen Gilbert's murders occurred primarily in 1995 and 1996, during her time as a nurse at the VA hospital in Northampton. She worked the night shifts in Ward C, which cared for elderly and ailing veterans. It was a unit already marked by high death rates, and Kristen, in theory, was a model nurse — fast to respond, calm in emergencies, trusted by superiors. But behind the sudden deaths and code blues, a pattern began to form.

She killed by injecting patients with epinephrine, a drug that, in controlled doses, stimulates the heart — but in overdose causes cardiac arrest. Her victims were typically elderly veterans, many already suffering from chronic conditions. She chose patients who were frail but not yet in critical danger — ones whose deaths could be rationalized but were not imminent. She acted when no one was looking, and when the code alarms sounded, she was always nearby, always first to arrive, always composed.

The method allowed for deniability. Epinephrine does not show up in standard post-mortem blood work. Most of her victims were cremated quickly, and families rarely questioned the cause of death. She exploited the VA’s overburdened system and the bureaucratic blind spots that allowed such deaths to pass unnoticed.

In several cases, her killings appeared to serve no other purpose than to create emergencies. She thrived on chaos — injecting a patient, triggering a code, and then rushing in to “save” them. Colleagues began calling her the “Angel of Death” behind her back, noting that whenever she was on duty, cardiac arrests spiked. Some nurses even avoided scheduling shifts with her.

A chilling layer to the murders was her romantic obsession with another employee, James Perrault, a VA security guard. Kristen often paged him during emergencies, creating dramatic moments in which they stood together over dying patients. She played the role of heroine and emotional victim — often collapsing into tears afterward, seeking comfort. The murders, in part, became a theater of crisis she orchestrated to keep Perrault's attention. In a macabre twist, death became her love language.

The frequency of deaths under her care rose so sharply that the hospital initiated an internal review. Staff members who feared retaliation began logging their suspicions anonymously. Whispers became reports. The pattern could no longer be ignored.

In early 1996, hospital administrators alerted the VA inspector general's office and federal authorities. A covert investigation was launched, and Kristen Gilbert was placed under surveillance. The evidence that followed was damning. Security logs, drug access records, and witness testimony all pointed toward her. During her shifts, the rate of cardiac arrests quadrupled. When she went on vacation, the deaths stopped.

In September 1996, Gilbert abruptly resigned after learning of the investigation. That same year, she checked herself into a psychiatric hospital and attempted suicide. From there, she began sending anonymous threats to the hospital in an attempt to intimidate staff who had spoken against her. The FBI traced the calls back to her.

She was arrested in 1998 for making those threats, and the murder charges followed. Her trial began in 2000 in federal court. The prosecution brought four murder charges and two attempted murder charges, supported by detailed hospital records, testimony from doctors, nurses, and forensic experts. The victims were named: Henry Hudon, Stanley Jagodowski, Kenneth Cutting, and Edward Skwira — all veterans, all vulnerable, all dead within minutes of exposure to epinephrine injections.

Gilbert's defense team claimed she was a scapegoat — that the deaths were coincidental, that the hospital's record-keeping was flawed, and that she was being demonized for being assertive and disliked. But the evidence was overwhelming. The controlled drug access logs showed repeated and unauthorized withdrawals of epinephrine on the nights of each death.

In March 2001, the jury found her guilty on all counts. The prosecution sought the death penalty, citing her position of trust, the vulnerability of her victims, and the premeditated nature of her crimes. But after intense deliberation, the jury opted for life imprisonment without parole.

Kristen Gilbert was transferred to a federal women's prison in Texas, where she remains today. Her name faded from national headlines, but inside medical circles her case continues to provoke discussion about institutional responsibility, psychological screening, and how a nurse — trained to heal — used her role to kill for attention.

Her legacy is not in body count alone, but in the method: calculated, quiet, and bureaucratically invisible. She exploited a system designed to protect and turned it into a mask for murder. She remains one of the few convicted female serial killers in the United States to operate within a medical institution — a reminder that trust, in the wrong hands, can be fatal.

Catherine Birnie

Confirmed Kills: 4
Suspected: Up to 8
Australia, 1986

Catherine Margaret Harrison was born on May 23, 1951, in Perth, Western Australia. Her life began with instability. After her mother's early death, she was sent to live with extended family members, separated from her siblings. She would later return to her father and stepmother's care, but the damage was already done — her upbringing shaped by disconnection, shifting households, and the absence of consistent affection.
As a teenager, Catherine grew rebellious, forming attachments to older men and drifting out of school. At fourteen, she first encountered David Birnie, a boy three years her senior with a reputation for petty theft and erratic behavior. Even after marrying another man — John Freeman, with whom she had seven children — Catherine continued to keep a photo of David hidden in her home. After her marriage ended and she lost custody of her children, she reconnected with him. By then, David had spent much of his adult life in and out of prison.
When Catherine moved into David's house in Willagee in 1985, their dynamic solidified immediately. They became partners in life, bonded by shared isolation and growing cruelty. They created a space where no one else mattered, and they quickly isolated themselves from outside influence. Their relationship was not one of slow decline — it accelerated into violence with chilling speed.
To neighbors, they were quiet. Reclusive. Nothing in the garden. Nothing in the windows. But behind the curtains, they began making plans.

In a span of five weeks during late 1986, Catherine and David Birnie abducted and killed four young women in Perth. Their crimes followed a disturbingly repetitive pattern. Each victim was selected for availability — young women walking alone, hitchhiking, or waiting at bus stops. Each was lured into their car under a false pretense, driven to their home, and kept captive in a locked bedroom.
The house itself was carefully prepared. Bedroom doors could be locked from the outside. Windows were sealed. Restraints were kept on hand. Their victims were held, threatened, and silenced — not for hours, but sometimes overnight — before being killed. Catherine's role was not passive. She was part of the lure, part of the process, and sometimes part of the act itself. She cleaned up afterward. She disposed of belongings. She encouraged continuation. In at least one case, she insisted on it.
The known victims were Mary Neilson (22), Susannah Candy (15), Noelene Patterson (31), and Denise Brown (21). Each was subjected to prolonged fear and ended with the same grim finality. The couple buried the bodies in shallow bush graves outside the city, returning to their home with no outward sign of remorse. At night, they listened to music. Catherine read romance novels. They planned the next.
A fifth woman was chosen — seventeen-year-old Kate Moir — but what followed would bring the spree to its end.

Kate Moir’s escape on November 10, 1986, was the unraveling of everything the Birnies had built. Taken under similar circumstances, she was held in their home overnight, but unlike the others, she managed to observe their routine, identify weaknesses, and wait. When Catherine left the house the next morning, Kate took her chance. She slipped through a window and ran, barefoot and disoriented, into the street until she reached a service station where she begged for help.

She told police her full story — not in fragments, but with chilling detail. She remembered the layout of the house, the method of restraint, the words spoken. Police moved quickly. At the Birnies’ home, they found physical evidence linking them to the crimes. David Birnie confessed within hours. Catherine followed suit, not seeking to defend herself but confirming every detail as if the truth, once spoken, belonged to them alone.

They led police to the graves in the bush. The court proceedings in 1987 were swift. Both pleaded guilty to four counts of murder. The judge sentenced them to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole, calling the crimes “beyond belief.” David Birnie died by suicide in prison in 2005. Catherine Birnie remains incarcerated in Western Australia, where she has made multiple parole applications, all denied.

Her presence behind bars continues to provoke public anger, especially from victims' families and local communities who believe she has never shown genuine remorse. Psychiatrists have noted that even decades after her imprisonment, she still refers to David Birnie in possessive, intimate terms — suggesting that the connection, and whatever it became, has never truly broken.

Catherine Birnie’s name remains synonymous with predatory violence in Australia. Her case is taught in criminology courses and remembered by police as one of the most chilling examples of a female accomplice not manipulated by force, but committed by will. She did not fear David Birnie — she followed him willingly. Together, they were a closed circuit of appetite, sustained not by necessity, but by consent.

Beverley Allitt

Confirmed Kills: 4
Suspected: Up to 13 victims total (4 dead, 9 injured)
United Kingdom, 1991

Beverley Gail Allitt was born on October 4, 1968, in the village of Corby Glen in Lincolnshire, England. She was raised in a modest household as one of four children. Her father worked in an off-license and her mother was a school cleaner. On the surface, her upbringing appeared ordinary — stable, uneventful, and lacking in obvious trauma. Yet teachers and classmates would later recall her as withdrawn, attention-seeking, and prone to fabricated illness.

By adolescence, Allitt began spending increasing time in medical settings, frequently reporting vague and shifting symptoms that never had a clear cause. She often wore bandages, claimed injuries no one witnessed, and demanded care for afflictions that shifted weekly. Her school record was spotty, and her behavior increasingly erratic. Despite these warning signs, she managed to enroll in nursing school, qualifying as a State Enrolled Nurse

— a tier below full Registered Nurse in the UK system — and was eventually placed in a pediatric ward.
Her training was brief and poorly supervised. Once assigned to the children's ward at Grantham and Kesteven Hospital in Lincolnshire, she began working rotating shifts, often night duty. Colleagues described her as reserved and, at times, overzealous. She had a tendency to place herself at the center of medical emergencies, always the first to notice a change, always eager to take charge. Others found her controlling, unnecessarily present at patients' bedsides, and suspiciously quick to assign blame when things went wrong.
Allitt's obsession with illness — both her own and others' — had found a stage. Within weeks of her arrival, the children on her ward began to die.

Between February and April 1991, Beverley Allitt attacked 13 children under her care at Grantham and Kesteven Hospital. Four of them — Liam Taylor, Becky Phillips, Claire Peck, and Timothy Hardwick — died. Nine others suffered serious, sometimes permanent, injury, including brain damage and cardiac arrest. Allitt's methods were varied but typically involved lethal injection of insulin, air embolisms, or potassium chloride — agents that could induce cardiac failure or seizures in otherwise stable children.
The victims ranged from just a few weeks to several years in age. They were in the hospital for minor illnesses — chest infections, stomach complaints, or seizures under observation. None were expected to deteriorate. Yet during Allitt's shifts, previously well children would suddenly collapse. She was often the first on the scene, performing resuscitation attempts and appearing distressed. In some cases, she stayed close to the grieving families afterward, offering condolences and inserting herself into their grief.
One child — Becky Phillips — died of what was initially thought to be a viral infection. Her twin sister Katie, admitted shortly afterward, survived a sudden attack but was left with permanent brain damage. Another, Claire Peck, died after her breathing equipment was tampered with. These events began piling up too quickly to explain.
Medical staff began to suspect a pattern. Resuscitation attempts were failing at abnormally high rates. Drug records didn't match dosages. Children who should have been recovering were dying without explanation. Allitt's name appeared again and again in nursing logs. But it wasn't until after Liam Taylor's death — and the subsequent investigation into a possible outbreak or staffing failure — that the alarm was raised.

The hospital initiated an internal review, and consultants contacted police after the eleventh unexplained collapse. An official investigation was launched by Lincolnshire Police. Medical records were audited, drug inventories reviewed, and blood samples re-examined. Traces of insulin were found in children who had never been prescribed it. Potassium levels were inconsistent. Autopsies revealed signs of suffocation, air bubbles in blood vessels, and drug overdoses.
The common factor across the victims was Allitt. She had been on duty during each incident, and in several cases, was the last person to attend to the child before collapse. She was suspended during the investigation, and police executed a search of her residence. Hospital equipment, records, and narcotics logs were analyzed. Though Allitt denied involvement, her alibis didn't hold.

In 1993, she was charged with four counts of murder, eleven counts of attempted murder, and several charges of causing grievous bodily harm. The trial took place at Nottingham Crown Court, where prosecutors presented a chilling sequence of events — showing that Allitt had induced medical emergencies to create chaos, then positioned herself as the one capable of restoring order.

Psychiatric experts diagnosed her with Munchausen syndrome by proxy, now referred to as factitious disorder imposed on another. This condition involves creating or exaggerating illness in others to draw sympathy and attention to oneself. The court heard that Allitt craved control and recognition and used the trust of the hospital system to carry out acts of extreme violence without immediate suspicion.

She was convicted on all major counts. The judge sentenced her to 13 life terms and recommended that she never be released.

Allitt was transferred to Rampton Secure Hospital, a high-security psychiatric facility, where she remains to this day. She is eligible for parole only under extraordinary medical or legal circumstances, which have so far never been granted.

The Beverley Allitt case led to sweeping changes in hospital procedures across the UK. Drug protocols were overhauled, staffing records scrutinized more closely, and alert systems for unusual death patterns in wards were introduced nationwide. She remains one of Britain's most notorious child murderers — not only for her acts but because she embodied the trusted figure of a nurse in a place where parents believed their children were safe.

Anna Maria Zwanziger

Confirmed Kills: 4
Suspected: Up to 6
Germany, 1808–1809

Anna Maria Zwanziger was born in 1760 in Nuremberg, Germany, during the late stages of the Holy Roman Empire's influence over the region. Little is recorded about her early life in detail, but it is known that she married a lawyer who died soon after their union, leaving her widowed and financially unstable. From then onward, she struggled to support herself. For a time, she worked as a domestic servant, a governess, and later as a housekeeper, often employed by magistrates, judges, and civil officials — men whose homes were formal, hierarchical, and governed by strict codes of order.

Colleagues described her as intelligent, serious, and highly conscious of social standing. She carried herself with the precision of someone determined not to fall back into poverty, but she also displayed signs of obsession with gaining approval from authority figures, particularly men who held power. She was not known for warmth or humor, but rather for her fixed gaze, her controlled speech, and her eagerness to prove her worth in households that offered little tolerance for failure.

The cultural atmosphere of early 19th-century Germany — where rigid class roles and gender expectations held firm — left little room for a woman like Anna Maria to ascend. Marriage was seen as the only path to stability, and aging single women were often viewed with suspicion. As her years advanced and her situation remained precarious, she began to turn to

methods of securing her position that went beyond charm or diligence. Her path to influence would be carved through cups of coffee and powdered arsenic.

Between 1808 and 1809, Anna Maria Zwanziger poisoned at least four individuals, all connected to the wealthy households where she worked as a housekeeper or caregiver. Her method was consistent and deeply calculated: she administered small doses of arsenic in food or drink — most often coffee — to the wives or female relatives of her employers. The poison acted gradually, causing the victim to become ill without immediate suspicion, allowing Anna Maria to insert herself as caretaker, nurse, and comforting presence during the illness.

In her mind, the suffering of her victims was a necessary prelude to security. By weakening or eliminating the mistresses of the house, she believed she could become indispensable to the household and, eventually, persuade the male heads of the families to marry her. In each case, she poisoned women who stood in her way, always followed by a performance of concern and fidelity. This pattern — poison, decline, nursing, death, mourning — played out again and again in at least three households across Bavaria.

Her poisons were prepared using arsenic extracted from flypaper, a common product at the time. She knew the correct dosages to avoid immediate detection, opting for repeated small doses that produced symptoms mimicking intestinal disease or general decline. Victims were often sick for weeks before dying. In the interim, Anna Maria would position herself as loyal and essential, speaking gently to the men of the house, bringing them coffee, arranging the kitchen, tending to their daily needs — all while plotting her next move.

Suspicion began to emerge when the illnesses followed her from one house to the next. Physicians could not explain the pattern, and each death left no clear cause — until one doctor, recalling a similar case from a previous city, reported his concerns. Authorities began watching her movements.

Anna Maria Zwanziger was arrested in 1809 after a new employer's children fell ill shortly after she was hired. The illnesses were not fatal, but the circumstances matched those described by previous households. When her belongings were searched, investigators found arsenic and fragments of flypaper in her room. Autopsies of earlier victims were ordered, and toxicological analysis — rudimentary at the time but sufficient — confirmed the presence of arsenic in the organs of several of the deceased.

She confessed under pressure, but her testimony was measured and cold. She explained her motives not in terms of hatred or greed, but of necessity. She had wanted to belong. She had wanted a place. In her words, the deaths were a tragic byproduct of striving for survival and position. She referred to herself as a "victim of circumstances," insisting she never wished pain on anyone, only to be kept and cared for. The court did not accept this rationale.

In 1811, Anna Maria Zwanziger was executed by beheading in Nuremberg. She was 51 years old. Her case shocked the public not only for the methodical nature of the killings, but for the setting — respectable homes, within the structure of law and order — and the use of caretaking as a veil for murder. The poisonings were quiet, polite, and domestic — the very opposite of the violence usually imagined in homicide. This made her crimes more chilling. She killed not in a moment of rage, but through routine.

The trial led to changes in the way domestic workers were vetted in elite households, and discussions in legal journals of the time began to explore the phenomenon of female poisoners in domestic service. She was one of the first women in German history to be publicly executed for serial murder, and her case remained infamous throughout the 19th century.
Anna Maria Zwanziger is remembered as a woman who used the tools of the household — tea, kindness, patience — as weapons. Her victims drank what she offered, sickened under her care, and died with her hand on their brow. There was no force, only calculation, and it is that quiet intention that has made her case endure.

Eliza "Lizzie" Halliday

Confirmed Kills: 4
Suspected: 7
United States, active 1891–1893

Eliza Margaret McNally, later known as Lizzie Halliday, was born in County Antrim, Ireland, in 1859. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was still a child, settling first in New York state. Early records of her life are patchy, but suggest a turbulent and unstable young adulthood. She married multiple times, each union ending in disappearance, desertion, or death. By the late 1880s, she had used at least three surnames and had moved frequently between towns in Pennsylvania and New York.
Descriptions of her behavior during these years tell of a woman who was volatile, deceptive, and secretive. Employers described her as erratic, with sudden outbursts followed by long spells of charm and submission. She often drifted into domestic jobs, changing names and inventing personal histories. Her early marriages were short-lived and often suspicious — one husband reportedly died from mysterious causes, while another vanished. Yet no serious investigations were launched. She moved quickly, always a few steps ahead of consequences.
In 1891, she married a much older man, Paul Halliday, a Civil War veteran who owned a small farm in Sullivan County, New York. At first, she seemed to settle into rural life with him. But neighbors soon reported strange behavior: sudden disappearances, fires breaking out on the farm, and accusations of theft. When questioned, Lizzie either smiled vacantly or collapsed into fits, claiming amnesia or possession. Her past remained unclear, even to those who lived beside her.

Between 1891 and 1893, Lizzie Halliday committed a series of brutal crimes culminating in the murder of her husband and two other women. Her methods were not calculated in the clinical way of poisoners or slow-burn manipulators — hers were blunt, frenzied, and chaotic.
In May 1891, the Halliday farmhouse burned to the ground. Lizzie claimed the fire had started accidentally while she was out. Inside, investigators found the charred body of one of Paul's sons from a previous marriage. Lizzie was arrested but released due to insufficient

evidence. Paul, ever compliant, took her back. A second fire followed months later. Each blaze was followed by silence and conflicting stories. Then Paul Halliday vanished. Suspicion deepened, and in August 1893, police searched the property thoroughly. Hidden beneath hay in a barn, they found the decomposing bodies of two women — Margaret and Sarah McQuillan, both itinerant seamstresses who had lodged with the Hallidays. They had been shot, their limbs twisted awkwardly, bodies dumped without burial. Days later, Paul Halliday's corpse was discovered beneath the floorboards of a summer kitchen on the property. He too had been shot, his body left to rot in secret.

Lizzie was arrested immediately. In custody, her behavior turned strange — she moaned, clawed at her clothes, spoke to herself, and refused food. Doctors believed she was faking madness to avoid punishment, but her performance persisted for weeks. She alternated between violent outbursts and passive staring. She was transferred to the Sullivan County jail in Monticello, where she continued her charade, tearing blankets to make nooses and speaking in riddles.

During her time in custody, she confessed, then recanted, then confessed again. Her stories were inconsistent. She claimed at times to have been possessed or guided by visions. At other moments, she shrugged and claimed not to know what had happened. Yet the evidence was overwhelming — the bodies, the bullets, the missing husband — and she was charged with multiple counts of murder.

Her trial began in 1894, drawing enormous public attention. The courtroom was filled with reporters and spectators eager to see the woman now called "The Worst Woman on Earth" by the press. Her appearance, with sharp eyes and unpredictable demeanor, fueled the sensational coverage. She spoke little during the trial, occasionally making strange gestures or whispering unintelligibly. The prosecution presented physical evidence, witness accounts, and exhumation results. The jury took only a short time to convict her.

Initially, Lizzie was sentenced to death — the first woman in New York state ever condemned to die by electric chair. But days before the sentence was to be carried out, the governor commuted her sentence on the grounds of mental illness. She was transferred to the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

At Matteawan, Lizzie did not disappear into obscurity. Her erratic and violent behavior continued, and in 1906 she stabbed a nurse, Nellie Wicks, to death with a pair of scissors. The attack was sudden, savage, and without provocation. Once again, she avoided prosecution by virtue of her legal status as criminally insane.

She remained institutionalized for the rest of her life, dying in 1918. Hospital records describe her as frequently violent, increasingly incoherent, and impossible to manage. She left no diary, no final confession, no explanation. Her motives were never clarified. She was a woman who killed without method, who seemed to act in bursts of fury, followed by days of hollow stillness.

Eliza "Lizzie" Halliday stands apart from most female killers of her era. She was not a poisoner, not a profit-seeker, not a cold planner. Her violence was raw, impulsive, and visible. Yet she also knew how to lie, how to stall, how to shape herself into a spectacle. She

evaded the chair through madness, but whether her madness was real remains a question unanswered even by those who studied her for years.
To this day, her name lingers in New York criminal history not for the number of her victims, but for the chaos she carried within her — and the strange, ragged violence that followed wherever she went.

Dorothea Puente

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: 9
United States, 1982–1988

Dorothea Helen Gray was born on January 9, 1929, in Redlands, California, into a household marked by neglect, alcoholism, and tragedy. Her father, Jesse James Gray, died of tuberculosis when Dorothea was just eight years old. Her mother, Trudy Mae, was an alcoholic who lost custody of the children shortly after. By the age of ten, Dorothea was in and out of orphanages and foster homes, none of them safe. She claimed to have suffered sexual abuse and beatings during these years, and while the full truth of her childhood is difficult to confirm, the pattern of abandonment and instability is clear.
By her teenage years, she was forging documents, lying about her age, and slipping easily between invented identities. At sixteen, she married Fred McFaul, a soldier who soon left her with two daughters. She abandoned both children — one to relatives, the other to adoption. The marriage failed within two years. Her early adult life became a blur of short marriages, bar work, theft, and jail time. She was convicted for forging checks in 1948 and arrested several more times throughout the 1950s and 60s.
By the 1980s, Dorothea had reinvented herself once more — now a respectable elderly woman running a boarding house at 1426 F Street in Sacramento. She wore thick glasses, tailored dresses, and kept her white hair carefully styled. Her voice was soft, polite, grandmotherly. She told neighbors she had worked with senators, helped the homeless, cooked for the poor. Most believed her.
She targeted the vulnerable: alcoholics, the mentally ill, the elderly. She welcomed them into her boarding house with smiles and meals, helped them apply for government assistance, and then slowly began replacing their lives with silence. In a system that barely noticed when the broken disappeared, Dorothea Puente thrived.
Sacramento in the 1980s had all the ingredients for her to go undetected — overworked case managers, absent families, and a housing crisis that left society's weakest people desperate for a room and a warm meal. Dorothea's house offered both — at first.

Between 1982 and 1988, Dorothea Puente murdered at least nine tenants in her boarding house, though the true number may be higher. Her victims were poor, often mentally disabled or struggling with addiction. They were the people society forgot — the ones who moved without phone calls, without visitors, without questions.
She poisoned them, primarily with drugs such as Dalmane or Halcion, powerful sedatives that caused respiratory depression and death in higher doses. Once dead or dying, she would

wrap the bodies in bedsheets or plastic and bury them in her yard, flower beds, or basement. To mask the smell, she sprinkled lime and planted flowers.

She continued to collect their Social Security and disability checks long after they were gone. In some cases, she forged signatures and letters to create the illusion they had moved or traveled. She would tell neighbors, “He moved to Oregon,” or, “She found work in Los Angeles.” No one pressed. They were, after all, just vagrants and alcoholics — or so people believed.

Victim selection was methodical. She targeted tenants with minimal family contact or those with cognitive disabilities. Many were referred to her by social workers impressed by her seemingly kind heart. She offered clean beds, daily meals, and a motherly smile. She baked cookies, invited visitors for tea, and insisted her house was a refuge. In reality, it was a graveyard.

The bodies began to pile up. Neighbors complained of foul odors, of heavy digging in the yard at night, of men who arrived but never left. But Dorothea remained charming. She donated to local charities, spoke at community events, and kept her hair pinned neat. Her weapon was trust.

The most tragic part of her method was not the poison but the bureaucracy. She studied the system and knew how to exploit its blind spots. As long as the checks kept arriving, no one looked too closely. Each death meant another signature, another deposit, another flower planted in the yard over a stranger no one missed.

It was not rage or sadism. It was cold utility. She didn’t scream, didn’t strike. She smiled and stirred sugar into tea while the bodies decomposed beneath the garden.

In November 1988, suspicion finally reached a breaking point. A social worker named Judy Moise reported one of her clients, Alvaro “Bert” Montoya — a 51-year-old man with schizophrenia and the mental capacity of a child — missing. Bert had been placed in Dorothea’s home months earlier and was doing well. Then suddenly, he was gone.

Police visited 1426 F Street to question Puente. She was calm, helpful, explained that Bert had gone on vacation. But inconsistencies in her story alarmed the detectives. They returned with a warrant and began digging in her yard. What they found was a nightmare.

Over the next several days, seven bodies were unearthed from shallow graves around the property. Some were wrapped in sheets, some double-bagged, all in varying stages of decomposition. The final body was identified as Bert Montoya.

As investigators prepared to arrest her, Puente asked if she could go to a nearby hotel for coffee. The officers — not suspecting she would flee — allowed her to go. Instead, she boarded a bus and escaped to Los Angeles. For five days, she vanished. She was finally recognized in a bar by another elderly man who had seen her face on the news. She was arrested without resistance.

The trial began in 1992 in Monterey County, due to the publicity in Sacramento. Prosecutors charged her with nine counts of murder. The defense claimed she was a kind-hearted woman who had simply panicked after tenants died of natural causes. Her frail appearance, soft voice, and grandmotherly manner were used to sway the jury.

But the evidence was overwhelming. Toxicology reports confirmed lethal drug levels in the bodies. Witnesses testified to her forgeries, her financial transactions, the lies about her

tenants' whereabouts. The prosecution painted her as a predator — not driven by hate or violence, but by greed and complete disregard for human life.
In 1993, she was convicted of three murders: Ruth Monroe, Leona Carpenter, and Alvaro Montoya. The jury deadlocked on six others. She received life without parole and was sent to the Central California Women's Facility.
Dorothea Puente died in prison on March 27, 2011, at the age of 82. She remained unrepentant to the end, insisting that her only crime was running a boarding house without a proper license. In prison, she kept herself busy by gardening and writing recipes. She sent her favorite ones to newspapers with notes signed "Best wishes — Dorothea."
Her house at 1426 F Street still stands. It has been restored and sold, but visitors leave flowers on the steps. Her story lingers in true crime lore, a tale of how easy it is for evil to wear a smile, serve cookies, and bury the forgotten under rosebushes.

Gwendolyn Graham

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: Up to 5
United States, 1980s

Gwendolyn Graham was born in 1963 in Texas, the details of her early childhood rarely discussed in official records or press coverage. Unlike many serial killers who act alone, Graham's story is inseparable from that of her lover and accomplice, Cathy Wood. Together, they formed one of the most infamous female duos in American criminal history — known publicly as the "Lethal Lovers."
Graham came from a turbulent background. Though not much is known about her family life, later psychiatric reports and trial testimonies hinted at a history of abuse, neglect, and emotional volatility. As a young woman, she was described as quiet, detached, and easily led — but also capable of manipulation and bursts of anger. She drifted through jobs and relationships before entering the health care field in her early twenties, eventually working at the Alpine Manor Nursing Home in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
It was there that she met Cathy Wood, an outgoing nurse's aide with a sly wit and troubled past of her own. Graham was drawn to her immediately. Their relationship began as flirtation, then became sexual, obsessive, and — eventually — deadly. The two women shared secrets, fantasies, and power in a relationship that blurred the lines between dominance and codependence. Wood later described Graham as the one with "the hands," suggesting she carried out the physical acts, while Wood orchestrated, encouraged, and enabled.
The 1980s, especially in underfunded nursing homes like Alpine Manor, were marked by low oversight, high turnover, and minimal scrutiny. Staff were overworked, and the elderly patients were vulnerable, often without family or visitors. Graham and Wood saw an opening in this void. What began as a twisted game turned into murder.

Between 1986 and 1987, Graham and Wood murdered at least three elderly women — with two more deaths suspected — at Alpine Manor Nursing Home. Their victims were vulnerable

patients suffering from dementia or other age-related conditions, often non-verbal or unable to report abuse. Graham and Wood selected them based not on hatred, but on availability. They called it a game. The code name was "The Murder Game."

The murders were carried out by suffocation. Graham would enter the patients' rooms at night, place a washcloth or pillow over the victim's face, and press until the breathing stopped. Wood kept watch outside. There was no mess, no noise, no screaming — just silence. And in silence, they felt power.

After each death, the women would return to each other, sometimes engaging in sex or writing love letters that referenced the killings as secret victories. Wood later claimed they developed nicknames for victims and kept mental scores. In one note, she described the game as a bonding ritual, proof of love, of shared darkness. Graham never wrote such notes — but she never denied the murders.

Though Graham rarely spoke openly about motive, it was clear she found in Cathy a reason to kill — not out of rage or profit, but loyalty. Her partner craved control, attention, dominance, and Graham delivered it in death. They were, by Cathy's later accounts, "in love with the secret."

What allowed the murders to continue unchecked was the setting: an overcrowded nursing home with poor record-keeping. Elderly deaths were common, and autopsies rare. When patients stopped breathing during the night, staff wrote "natural causes," signed the forms, and moved on. No one questioned the pattern. No one looked too closely. Until the confessions came.

The case remained unknown to authorities until two years after the final murder, when Cathy Wood — following a bitter breakup with Graham — approached police in 1988. She told detectives that Graham had killed multiple patients and that she had been involved. Her motive appeared tangled: part revenge, part fear, part need to unburden. She presented herself as the passive half, the manipulated one, and said Graham had been the killer from the start.

Investigators initially met her story with skepticism. But as they probed deeper, they found inconsistencies in death records at Alpine Manor, particularly during Graham and Wood's shifts. Several victims had died suddenly, without apparent illness. Others had been cremated without autopsy. Staff interviews confirmed the pair had a secretive, intense relationship. Some remembered dark jokes, odd behavior, and sudden transfers of patients from their care.

Graham was arrested in late 1988. Unlike Wood, she denied involvement at first but offered few details. As Wood testified against her, the case took shape: a female duo killing for pleasure, for power, for love twisted beyond recognition. In 1989, Gwendolyn Graham was convicted of second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder in the deaths of Margaret Chambers, Mae Mason, and Edith Cook. She received a sentence of life imprisonment.

Cathy Wood, having cooperated, was charged with one count of second-degree murder and one count of conspiracy. She was sentenced to 20 to 40 years and, controversially, was granted parole in 2020 after serving over 30 years. Her release sparked public outrage, particularly among families of the victims, who saw her not as an accessory but as a co-architect of the crimes.

Graham remains incarcerated in Michigan, serving life without parole. She rarely gives interviews and has not spoken publicly about the crimes since her conviction.
The case of Gwendolyn Graham and Cathy Wood remains unique in American criminal history. Female serial killers are rare. Female serial duos, rarer still. That they targeted the helpless, inside a place meant to provide care, makes it one of the most chilling breaches of trust imaginable. The "Lethal Lovers" didn't kill in fury or greed, but as a game, played in the night, while the rest of the world — staff, families, patients — slept unaware.

Leonarda Cianciulli

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: 3–4
Italy, 1939–1940

Leonarda Cianciulli was born on April 14, 1894, in Montella, a mountainous village in southern Italy's Avellino province. Her early life was grim, shaped by familial resentment and social stigma. Her mother, Emilia di Nolfi, was forced to marry her father, Mariano Cianciulli, after being raped by him — a union born of violation, not affection. Leonarda grew up believing she was unwanted, the living embodiment of her mother's shame, and that belief settled into her like ash.
From an early age, she displayed emotional instability, superstitious behavior, and violent mood swings. She attempted suicide twice during adolescence. Her neighbors whispered that she was cursed. The belief wasn't entirely self-made — she often claimed her mother had cursed her for marrying a man of her own choosing, rather than the wealthy suitor arranged for her. When she married Raffaele Pansardi, a registry clerk, against her family's wishes in 1917, the relationship with her mother fractured permanently.
She and her husband moved frequently — from Montella to Lariano, eventually settling in Correggio, a quiet town in northern Italy. There, she tried to build a life of routine and respectability. She ran a small shop, sold soaps and herbal remedies, read fortunes, and offered charms to ward off bad luck. To her neighbors, she was kind but strange, always murmuring prayers and casting salt over her shoulder, fixated on omens and spirits. Yet beneath the daily rituals, she carried a personal torment: her obsession with protecting her children.
Leonarda had seventeen pregnancies. Three ended in miscarriage. Ten of her children died in infancy. Only four survived into adulthood. This loss defined her. Her grief became a weaponized superstition, and the idea that her family was cursed consumed her thoughts. She turned to local folklore, witchcraft, and eventually a Romani fortune teller who told her: "In your right hand, I see prison. In your left, a criminal asylum." This prophecy haunted her. She became convinced that blood was the only thing that could break the curse — specifically, blood offered in exchange for the safety of her surviving son, Giuseppe.
By 1939, Italy was trembling beneath Mussolini's shadow. War was approaching. Her son enlisted in the military. Leonarda believed the only way to protect him from death was human sacrifice. So, she prepared her kitchen not for guests, but for murder.

Leonarda Cianciulli murdered three women between 1939 and 1940. Each of them came to her for help. Each left her home in pieces.

Her victims were middle-aged women in distress — spinsters, widows, poor and desperate. They trusted Leonarda, who offered spiritual guidance, friendship, and — fatally — assistance. She lured them with promises of love, employment, or a fresh start. Then she drugged them, hacked them apart with an axe, and disposed of their bodies with cold precision. But it was not disposal alone that horrified Italy. It was what she did after.

The first victim was Faustina Setti, a lonely woman in her late fifties who longed for marriage. Leonarda told her that a suitable man awaited her in Pola, a city in Istria. She convinced Faustina to write farewell letters to family, and on the promised day, Leonarda invited her for wine. After Faustina passed out, Leonarda killed her with an axe. She then chopped the body into nine pieces, gathered the blood in a basin, and boiled the flesh with caustic soda in a large pot until it dissolved into a thick black mass, which she poured into the septic tank. The blood she dried in the oven, mixed with flour, sugar, chocolate, and milk, and baked into tea cakes.

She later offered those cakes to neighbors and even ate them herself.

The second victim, Francesca Soavi, was lured with the promise of a job at a girls' school in Piacenza. She, too, was asked to write farewell letters. Leonarda used the same method: drugged wine, axe, boiling flesh. Again, the blood was used in cakes. Again, she told no one. The town remained unaware.

The third victim, Virginia Cacioppo, had once been a singer. Leonarda told her she could secure her a position as secretary to a theatrical impresario in Florence. After the killing, she noted Virginia's flesh was fattier than the others — she rendered the fat into soap. She later confessed that she gave bars of it to neighbors, claiming it was a "fine creamy lather." She also baked blood-laced cakes again. "They were sweet," she said during her confession, "and served to friends and family."

The killings were, in her mind, ritualistic. Each death, she believed, sealed her son's safety. Her use of body parts was not only pragmatic — it was sacred. The soap, the cakes, the buried bones — all part of an offering. Not to any God, but to the ancient, quiet terror she had nurtured since childhood.

Leonarda's downfall began after Virginia Cacioppo vanished. Virginia's sister grew suspicious and reported her last known visit — to Leonarda's home. Police investigated, but Leonarda welcomed them with calm hospitality. Only when they pressed harder, and when rumors began to swirl, did her story crack.

On discovery of letters written in the victims' hands, and inconsistencies in Leonarda's statements, she was arrested. At first, she denied everything. But faced with mounting evidence, she confessed — not with remorse, but with pride. She described the murders in vivid detail, corrected investigators when they misstated facts, and described her methods with clinical satisfaction. "I gave them quick, clean deaths," she said, "and used everything. Nothing was wasted."

Her trial took place in 1946, in the post-war atmosphere of a country already soaked in blood and loss. The public was stunned. A middle-aged woman, known for her kindness and

fortune-telling, had murdered three women and boiled their corpses in her kitchen. The press named her “La Saponificatrice di Correggio” — The Soap-Maker of Correggio.
In court, she was lively, smiling, correcting prosecutors, and even offering baking advice to reporters. Her madness did not flare outward; it hid in wit and charm. A psychiatric evaluation found her legally sane but severely disturbed. She was found guilty of three counts of murder and sentenced to thirty years in prison and three in a criminal asylum — just as the fortune teller had predicted.
Leonarda Cianciulli died of cerebral apoplexy on October 15, 1970, in the asylum in Pozzuoli. She was 76. Her cooking tools — the cauldrons, knives, and bone saws — were preserved in Italy’s Criminology Museum in Rome, where they remain on display.
Her legacy is one of the most grotesque in European crime. She was not driven by profit, nor by thrill, but by protection — a warped, superstitious belief that the death of others could save her son. Her crimes were a ritual, performed with the domestic tenderness of baking, beneath the false smile of a mother who would do anything — absolutely anything — to protect her child.

Martha Beck

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: Up to 20
United States, 1947–1949

Martha Jule Seabrook was born on May 6, 1920, in Milton, Florida. Her early life was shaped by physical deformity and emotional isolation. A childhood illness left her with a hormonal disorder that caused premature puberty and weight gain, making her the target of relentless mockery. She developed large breasts as early as ten and by adolescence had grown obese, reclusive, and prone to fantasy. Her mother was said to be abusive, while her father was distant and ineffective, offering little protection or warmth.
As a teenager, Martha’s desperation for affection intensified. She found brief work in a mortuary, where rumors claimed she spent long hours alone with the deceased. Whether that part is true or not, her longing for companionship was undeniable. She fabricated romances, wrote letters to imaginary suitors, and told neighbors she was secretly engaged. In her early twenties, she briefly married and had two children. The marriage collapsed quickly, and she raised the children alone in Florida, working as a nurse at a local hospital.
Unable to cope with rejection and burdened by poverty, she began placing classified ads in "lonely hearts" columns — personal advertisements for romantic companionship, common in the postwar years. It was through one of these ads that she met Raymond Fernandez in 1947. Their correspondence grew intense almost immediately. When she finally met him in person, she was so smitten that she gave up her children to the Salvation Army and left Florida to live with him in New York.
Fernandez had a long history of scams, theft, and manipulation. He preyed on lonely women for their money, seducing them through charm, then vanishing. But with Martha, something shifted. She wasn’t just another target. She joined him. She accepted his lifestyle and became his accomplice. Her jealousy was intense, violent, and uncompromising. She hated the

women he seduced — not because they loved him, but because he showed them attention. Their crimes began soon after.

Between 1947 and 1949, Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez operated under the guise of a romantic con: Fernandez would woo women through lonely hearts ads, promising love, often marriage. He would visit them, stay in their homes, and slowly siphon their savings. Martha played the role of his sister or housekeeper — a presence meant to lend respectability. In truth, she was his partner in deceit, and in three cases, murder.

The murders began when Fernandez tried to con a woman who Martha saw as a threat. Her possessiveness grew uncontrollable. If a woman seemed to bond too closely with Raymond, Martha's rage exploded. She would strike without warning, sometimes with a hammer, sometimes strangling with cloth or rope, while Fernandez either participated or stood by. Their confirmed victims include:

1. Janet Fay, 66, a widow from Albany, New York, who accepted Fernandez's marriage proposal. When she discovered his lies, she confronted him. Martha struck her with a hammer, and they buried her body in cement.
2. Delphine Downing, 28, a widow in Michigan. She was drugged after suspecting their scheme. When her two-year-old daughter cried at seeing her unconscious mother, Martha strangled the child. The next day, they killed Delphine as well, shooting her in the head.

These murders shattered any illusion that Martha was simply manipulated. She acted on her own fury, often without instruction. Her jealousy, coupled with Fernandez's schemes, made them lethal. In the weeks after each killing, they resumed their search for new victims through classified ads. Always another lonely woman, another quiet town.

They traveled across the eastern United States, from New York to Michigan to Illinois, often using false names and renting rooms in boarding houses. Many of their schemes ended in theft alone. But whenever a woman drew too close to Fernandez, or whenever Martha sensed a threat, violence followed.

Though only three murders were proven, investigators believed the pair may have been responsible for as many as twenty deaths. Records were incomplete, many of the women were elderly or isolated, and some simply disappeared after brief courtships.

Their downfall came not through clever police work, but carelessness. After murdering Delphine Downing and her daughter in Michigan, they lingered in the house for days. Neighbors grew suspicious and called police. When officers arrived, they found the bodies buried in the basement. Beck and Fernandez were arrested on the spot.

Their confessions were strangely theatrical. Fernandez, bald and cold-eyed, claimed full responsibility. Beck, heavy-set and emotionally erratic, wept one moment and cursed the next. They admitted to killing Janet Fay and offered up details about other women they had deceived. In the press, they became a spectacle — "The Lonely Hearts Killers." Headlines screamed about murder and madness, love and betrayal, painting them as grotesque symbols of postwar moral collapse.

The trial took place in New York in 1949, focused primarily on the death of Janet Fay. The courtroom was packed, the testimony lurid. Martha played to the cameras, at times tearful, at

times defiant. She claimed her love for Fernandez was so complete that no act — even murder — was too much. Fernandez called her "the best woman in the world," but insisted he had led her astray.
Neither defense swayed the jury. On August 22, 1949, both were convicted and sentenced to death.
They spent their final years on death row at Sing Sing Prison. Martha wrote daily letters to Fernandez, though they were separated. In her final note, she wrote, "My story is a love story, but only those tortured with love can understand what I mean… if I must die, I will die with my head high, unashamed."
On March 8, 1951, they were executed in the electric chair within minutes of each other. They were buried in the same cemetery, under marked graves.
The case of Martha Beck remains one of the most infamous in American history. Not for the body count alone, but for her part in it — a woman who gave up her children, followed a con man into darkness, and killed not for money, but from a twisted passion she called love. Her story blurred the boundary between accomplice and equal, victim and predator, and left behind a legend more chilling than most who came before or after.

Linda Hazzard

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: Over 15
United States, 1900s–1912

Linda Laura Burfield was born in 1867 in Carver County, Minnesota. She grew up during a period when medicine was in flux — a time of patent remedies, unlicensed practitioners, and rising distrust of industrialized treatments. Linda aligned herself early with the school of "natural healing," studying various fringe therapies, including fasting cures, hydrotherapy, and dietary restriction. She never attended formal medical school but was allowed to practice under Washington state's loophole for "fasting specialists," receiving a dubious credential as a "physician" through licensing laws that did not require an M.D.
Her obsession with fasting took shape not merely as a belief but as a system — one she would later codify into her self-published book *Fasting for the Cure of Disease* in 1908. In it, she argued that most ailments arose from internal toxins and could be purged through prolonged abstention from food. While fasting had adherents in alternative medicine circles, Hazzard took it to extremes. Her cure often lasted weeks, with patients fed only small portions of tomato juice, broths, or orange slices — sometimes just a few spoonfuls a day.
By the early 1900s, she had opened her first facility in Minnesota, but allegations of abuse and death began to surface quickly. Rather than face legal consequences there, she moved west — to Washington state — where she would build her most infamous institution: Wilderness Heights, near Olalla, Kitsap County. The locals called it "Starvation Heights."
Patients came to her with faith and desperation. Many were chronically ill, frightened, or disillusioned by traditional medicine. Others were wealthy seekers of spiritual or holistic healing. In Hazzard, they found a figure of intense conviction, charisma, and unyielding confidence. They also found themselves slowly vanishing.

Linda Hazzard's method of killing was through starvation under the guise of treatment. Patients admitted to her care were placed on strict fasting regimens — consuming minimal liquid nutrients, with caloric intakes so low that their bodies deteriorated rapidly. As their strength declined, Hazzard claimed it was evidence that the body was purging illness. She reframed visible suffering as "the healing crisis," discouraging all outside interference.
During these treatments, Hazzard controlled every aspect of her patients' lives. She often seized power of attorney, became executor of estates, and acquired legal control over their assets. Jewelry, bank documents, and cash were frequently signed over or quietly extracted. She employed a private nurse and sometimes forged documents, masking her intentions beneath paperwork and ritual. Some patients were too weak to resist. Others died before they realized they were being manipulated.
Her victims were not confined to one class or nationality. Among the most notable were the Williamson sisters — Claire and Dorothea — two wealthy British women who came to Washington seeking a rejuvenating fast. Under Hazzard's care, they were placed on a starvation diet. Claire died in 1912 at the height of her emaciation, while Dorothea, barely able to move, was rescued by relatives who had become suspicious and traveled from Australia. They found her skeletal, disoriented, and too weak to sit up.
The sisters had been housed in a cottage, watched constantly, and denied contact with outsiders. Their family uncovered that Claire's valuable items had disappeared, bank records had been altered, and Hazzard had positioned herself as executor of the estate. The case became a scandal across the Pacific.
When authorities began examining past deaths, they found numerous similar patterns — patients dying under Linda's watch, their remains handled without inquiry, and possessions quietly absorbed into her name. While only a few deaths were confirmed to result directly from starvation, records pointed to at least a dozen similar incidents.
Bodies were buried nearby, often cremated or interred in plain graves. Death certificates listed natural causes, with Linda herself sometimes signing them. Those few who survived her treatments were left permanently weakened or mentally disoriented.

Following the outcry over Claire Williamson's death and the testimony of Dorothea, Linda Hazzard was brought to trial in 1912. The case was closely followed in international newspapers, with coverage painting her as a quack, a manipulator, and a woman who turned science into cruelty.
In court, she maintained her innocence. She claimed her treatment methods were misunderstood and that her patients had willingly entered her care. Her defense argued that fasting was legal and that patients had the right to refuse food. But the prosecution presented evidence of fraud, altered wills, missing property, and medical testimonies that proved death from malnutrition.
She was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to a short prison term of two years. After her release, she returned to her property and attempted to reopen her sanitarium, but public trust had vanished. Wilderness Heights was shut down, and the surviving family members of former patients continued to press for its closure.

In a final turn of irony, Linda Hazzard died in 1938 — from self-imposed fasting. She had attempted to treat herself for an illness using her own starvation cure. Within weeks, she succumbed to the same system she had imposed on others.
Her legacy endures as one of the darkest examples of medical abuse in early 20th-century America. Though not convicted as a serial killer in legal terms, her role in orchestrating multiple deaths through calculated starvation and financial manipulation has placed her among the most infamous female murderers in history.
Starvation Heights — both the name and the place — remains a grim chapter in medical history. The ruins of her sanitarium still exist in Olalla, slowly reclaimed by the forest, remembered as the site where healing was promised, but death was given instead.

Christine Falling

Confirmed Kills: 3
Suspected: Up to 6
United States, 1980–1982

Christine Laverne Falling was born on March 12, 1963, in Perry, Florida. Her childhood was shaped by poverty, neglect, and a constant struggle for stability. She was one of several children in a household that never seemed able to meet even basic needs. Christine's early development was marked by illness, learning difficulties, and emotional withdrawal. By the age of six, she had been placed in and out of foster homes, each move adding to the sense that she occupied a place no one wanted her to stay in.
Those who knew her as a girl described her as quiet, awkward, and often confused by social cues. She was teased at school for her size and her unpredictable outbursts. She struggled academically and eventually dropped out in seventh grade. Her IQ was measured below average, and she moved through adolescence with limited understanding of how to manage frustration or responsibility.
By her early teens, she began babysitting for neighbors — one of the few ways a girl with her limited schooling and resources could earn money. Families saw her as simple but willing, someone who could watch children for a few hours at a time. Christine herself craved approval. She wanted to be trusted, to feel valued. Instead, she carried an undercurrent of resentment and fear that expressed itself in ways no one noticed until it was too late.
Her first marriage, at age fourteen, lasted just six weeks. Her husband left quickly, citing erratic behavior and jealousy. After the marriage collapsed, she drifted between households, often filling temporary caretaking roles. It was during these years that the first deaths occurred.

Between 1980 and 1982, several children under Christine Falling's care died suddenly. The deaths at first appeared to be medical tragedies — respiratory failure, seizures, or sudden collapse. But the pattern that tied them together was unmistakable once investigators looked closely: each child had been in Christine's exclusive care at the time of death.
Her first known victim was an infant she was babysitting in 1980. The baby was found unresponsive, and the death was labeled as natural. Weeks later, another infant died after

Christine was left alone with her. The cause was again described as unexplained. In both cases, Christine told authorities she had “found them not breathing.” Her demeanor was subdued but calm, and she offered vague explanations, claiming she had tried to help.
As the pattern continued, the circumstances grew more difficult to ignore. A toddler collapsed after spending the day with Christine. A young girl she was hired to care for died suddenly. An elderly man she briefly cared for as a sitter passed away under similar conditions. Each case involved the same sudden cessation of breathing. Each had no visible signs of external harm.
Eventually, suspicion centered on Christine’s hands. Investigators believed she had manually suffocated her victims. The method required no weapon, no planning, and left little evidence — especially in infants and small children. She acted in moments of frustration or panic, and afterward presented herself as bewildered and frightened by what had happened.
By 1982, after yet another child died while Christine was babysitting, authorities began probing her past more deeply. Autopsies were ordered. Toxicology tests were run. A timeline was drawn. The same name appeared each time.

In mid-1982, Christine Falling was confronted by investigators after the death of a two-year-old girl named Cassidy Johnson. The patterns were too stark to dismiss. During questioning, Christine struggled to maintain her earlier composure. After hours of interviews, she finally admitted that she had “put her hands over their mouths” and that she “couldn’t help it when they cried.” The confession was halting, disorganized, and filled with fragmented explanations rather than clear motive.
She was charged with multiple counts of murder. Her trial never reached a full jury phase. Instead, Christine entered a guilty plea to three counts of murder in exchange for avoiding the death penalty. The court sentenced her to life in prison.
During sentencing, experts described her as intellectually limited, emotionally stunted, and deeply unstable. They noted she had difficulty distinguishing irritation from danger, and that she often responded to stress with sudden, overwhelming impulses. But the court maintained that she was responsible for her actions. The families of the children she had killed sat quietly as the sentence was read.
Christine Falling has remained incarcerated since 1982. She became eligible for parole multiple times, but each hearing ended with the same conclusion: she remained a risk. She is still held in a Florida state prison.
Her case is often cited in studies of young female offenders, particularly those involved in caretaking roles. Unlike many serial killers, Christine had no clear plan, no financial motive, and no theatrical behavior. Her crimes grew out of a combination of immaturity, impulse, emotional void, and proximity to vulnerable victims. Her story remains one of the starkest warnings about unexamined caretaking arrangements in small communities, where trust can be extended quickly — and withdrawn too late.

Tillie Klimek

Confirmed Kills: 3

Suspected: Up to 20
United States, 1912–1922

Born as Otylia Gburek in 1876 in Poland, Tillie Klimek immigrated to the United States as a child with her family, settling in the Polish-American enclave of Chicago's Little Poland. She grew up in the working-class neighborhoods near Wicker Park, where cultural traditions from her homeland remained strong and tightly bound the immigrant community. Her formal education was minimal, and like many girls of her time and background, she was married young. Her life appeared to follow the expected course of women in her community: a modest home, domestic labor, and quiet obedience.

But by her late thirties, something began to shift. Widowed more than once, she seemed to carry with her a strange reputation — not of mourning, but of prediction. Tillie, neighbors said, could foresee death. She claimed to have dreams that warned her when people around her were going to die. When her husbands fell ill and passed, she nodded knowingly and told those around her that she had "seen it coming." What no one realized, at first, was that the dreams were her own inventions — and the deaths her own design.

People found her peculiar but not threatening. She made dark jokes at wakes. She predicted the exact day her husbands would die, and then, remarkably, they did. She knitted her mourning clothes weeks in advance. Death seemed to follow her, but never raised alarms. In a world where men often died young from illness, accident, or drink, she passed unnoticed — a quiet widow in a black dress, hiding poison in her kitchen drawer.

Between 1912 and 1922, Tillie Klimek poisoned at least three of her husbands and was suspected in the deaths of multiple others, including extended family members, neighbors, and even a dog. Her weapon was arsenic — purchased under false names or obtained through home remedies — which she administered in soups, stews, and beer.

Her pattern was both cruel and theatrical. Before each poisoning, she would often tell friends or relatives that her husband had only weeks to live. She claimed to hear a voice in her dreams or said she had received a "warning." Then, she would begin to feed him small doses of arsenic, causing him to fall ill slowly. Once bedridden, the man would decline rapidly. By the time doctors were called, it was often too late, and the death was attributed to natural causes.

Her first known victim was her husband Joseph Mitkiewicz, who died in 1914 after a sudden and unexplained illness. She remarried quickly and repeated the pattern. Frank Kupczyk, her second husband, died in 1919 after several weeks of declining health, during which Tillie predicted his death daily and told neighbors not to "bother getting too friendly." She was known to sit by his bed knitting funeral garments, speaking openly of his "soon-to-be passing."

In total, she was married at least four times. Each husband died under suspiciously similar circumstances — except the last. When she married Joseph Klimek in 1921, she resumed her pattern of feeding him poisoned food. But he became suspicious after several meals and fell violently ill. He was hospitalized, and tests revealed arsenic in his system. An investigation followed, and Tillie was arrested.

Further inquiry revealed a shocking series of connections: previous husbands had all died suddenly. Several relatives had become ill or died after eating her cooking. Even her cousin, Nellie, had allegedly fallen ill after an argument. Exhumations were ordered, and forensic tests confirmed the presence of arsenic in multiple bodies.

Tillie Klimek was arrested in October 1922. Her demeanor was calm, even mocking. She cracked jokes about the investigation, told officers she had "great aim" when it came to husbands, and at times appeared amused by the attention. Her lack of remorse and strange humor unsettled reporters and investigators alike. She continued to refer to herself as a clairvoyant, insisting she had only "seen" death coming, not caused it.
During her trial in 1923, the prosecution presented evidence from exhumed bodies, testimony from surviving victims, and medical experts who confirmed the presence of poison. Witnesses included friends and neighbors who testified that she had predicted the deaths of her husbands in eerie detail — and had seemed delighted when proven right. At one point, it was revealed that she had offered tainted food to a stray dog, which died soon after.
She was convicted of the murder of her third husband, Frank Kupczyk, and sentenced to life in prison. Her accomplice and cousin, Nellie Kulik, was charged but not convicted. Tillie became the first woman in Cook County to be sentenced to life imprisonment.
She served her sentence at the Joliet Correctional Center in Illinois, where she remained until her death in 1936. She was reportedly quiet and reclusive in prison, never confessing to additional murders and never expressing guilt.
Tillie Klimek's case stands as a rare instance in American history where a female serial poisoner acted with open confidence and theatrical flair. Her strange blend of fatal prediction and practical murder blurred the line between pretense and premeditation. She cloaked her crimes in dark prophecy — and those around her believed it, even as the bodies piled up.

Miyuki Ishikawa

Confirmed Kills: 2
Suspected: Over 100
Japan, 1944–1948

Miyuki Ishikawa was born in 1897 in southern Japan, during an era of transition between imperial tradition and creeping industrial modernization. Details of her childhood are limited, but it is known that she pursued higher education — unusual for women in early 20th-century Japan — and eventually graduated from the University of Tokyo with a degree in midwifery. This accomplishment placed her among a very small number of women in the country at the time who were both formally educated and trained in medical service. She carried herself with formality, discipline, and authority. Those who knew her described a woman who commanded respect, rarely smiled, and seemed more administrative than maternal in her manner.
By the 1940s, Ishikawa had secured a senior position at the Kotobuki maternity hospital in Tokyo. Japan was then in the final years of World War II, and the nation faced critical shortages — food, housing, medical supplies — while dealing with the destruction caused by

constant bombings. Poverty was widespread, particularly in urban neighborhoods where unmarried women with unwanted pregnancies were abandoned, socially ostracized, or simply unable to care for children. In this world of collapse, desperation, and moral ambiguity, Miyuki Ishikawa began to act.
She did not shout. She did not carry a weapon. Her crimes were built around silence and omission. And they took place in rooms where life was expected to begin.

Between 1944 and 1948, Miyuki Ishikawa was responsible — directly or through neglect — for the deaths of an estimated 103 infants, though she was only ever formally convicted of two. Working as a midwife and hospital administrator, she identified women who had given birth but had no means of supporting their children. In many cases, these mothers were unmarried, impoverished, and without social support. Rather than refer them to shelters or services, Ishikawa offered what she presented as a merciful alternative: she would "handle the matter" discreetly, keeping their babies at the hospital under her care.
In truth, these newborns were left to die slowly through starvation and neglect. There was no violent trauma, no overt action — only the deliberate withholding of food, care, and cleanliness. She allowed them to weaken until they could no longer survive. This form of passive killing left little immediate trace and was easily explained away as infant mortality, which was high in postwar Japan.
In time, Ishikawa's actions became systemic. She charged families money — calling them "fees" — to take custody of unwanted babies, claiming it would cover the cost of adoption or care. Many of the infants never left the hospital alive. Others were disposed of quietly, with assistance from accomplices including her husband, Takeshi Ishikawa, and a local mortician who helped falsify death records. She developed a routine. The deaths were rarely questioned. No one wanted the children. The system allowed it.
What stands out is not only the number of deaths, but the bureaucratic efficiency with which they were carried out. Ishikawa was not driven by sudden rage, but by the belief that she was doing what society would not admit it needed: ending the lives of unwanted children in a time and place where they would otherwise be abandoned to slow death anyway. Her sense of justification, however horrifying, was calmly expressed when she was later confronted.

The pattern might have continued unnoticed had it not been for a police officer who received an anonymous tip about irregularities in death certifications. An investigation began quietly in 1948. When officers searched the hospital and questioned staff, they uncovered dozens of tiny bodies, improperly stored or hastily cremated. The scale was staggering. Forensic examinations suggested severe malnutrition and neglect as the primary cause of death. Ishikawa was arrested, along with her husband and the mortician. She confessed without emotion, stating that she had acted out of necessity, claiming there were no resources to care for the children and that their mothers had consented in silence. She maintained that society had failed first — and she had merely followed its lead. Her calmness in court, her precise manner of speech, and her refusal to express regret created a national uproar.
In 1950, she was convicted of manslaughter — not murder — and sentenced to just eight years in prison. Her sentence was later reduced to six. The leniency sparked outrage across Japan, but it also reflected the uncomfortable truth: she had operated in a gray space created

by social indifference, war-torn chaos, and institutional neglect. At the time, there were no specific laws in Japan addressing the deliberate starvation of infants in care facilities.
After serving her sentence, Miyuki Ishikawa disappeared from public life. No reliable records exist of her later years. Some accounts suggest she lived quietly under a different name; others claim she died in obscurity. No photograph of her has ever been widely circulated. Her case remains one of the most chilling examples of mass infant death at the hands of a caregiver — not through active violence, but through methodical and institutional abandonment.
Her legacy is one of silence. Though largely unknown outside of Japan, within the country her case led to reforms in child welfare laws, licensing for maternity homes, and the mandatory reporting of infant deaths. Yet her story is rarely discussed, as if the scale of what she did was too terrible for the public to fully confront.

Enriqueta Martí

Confirmed Kills: 1
Suspected: 12 to over 20
Spain, 1909–1912

Enriqueta Martí i Ripollés was born in 1868 in Sant Feliu de Llobregat, a small industrial town near Barcelona, Spain. Her early life offered few comforts. She came of age in a working-class household, with limited education and no real path toward social mobility. As a young woman, she moved to Barcelona seeking work. Like many women of her class, she found herself employed in domestic service, working long hours for little pay in private households.
By her twenties, she had transitioned into prostitution, operating in the lower quarters of the city where desperation, disease, and hunger walked openly through the streets. Though records from this period are unclear, it is believed she drifted between jobs and identities, slipping between roles as a maid, fortune teller, midwife, and healer. By the turn of the century, she had become well-known in the underworld of Barcelona as a supplier of black-market remedies — ointments, powders, broths — sold under the claim that they cured tuberculosis, syphilis, and infertility.
She moved constantly, changing apartments, altering her name, and blending in among the poor. But beneath the disguises, Enriqueta was developing a reputation for something darker. Whispers of missing children and strange odors from her kitchens began to circulate. In neighborhoods where children disappeared often and justice was slow, her activities were able to continue in shadow. When people knocked at her door, they saw a healer. When she closed it, something else began.

Between 1909 and 1912, Enriqueta Martí abducted children from the streets of Barcelona — some for exploitation, others for ritual killing. She used them to prepare homemade elixirs and cures, made from human remains, which she sold to wealthy clients who believed in the medicinal power of body parts. Her victims were usually the children of the poor: street kids,

orphans, or the offspring of working families who had no means to protect them or find them once they vanished.
She operated under several identities: nurse, healer, nun, herbalist. This fluidity allowed her to move between the city's neighborhoods, entering spaces others could not. She often disguised herself as a beggar or used children she had already abducted to lure new ones into her apartment.
Once in her control, the children were kept in grim conditions — often tied up, hidden behind false walls or locked in cupboards. Some were starved, others subjected to abuse. When they died or were killed, Enriqueta used their fat, blood, and bone marrow to make potions that she sold to wealthy families claiming they would cure disease or enhance youth. These products were expensive, sold in secret, and passed among the elite, many of whom preferred not to ask questions about their origin.
In 1912, after a missing girl named Teresita Guitart Congost was spotted peering from the window of one of Enriqueta's apartments, neighbors tipped off police. Officers raided the flat and found the girl alive, hidden in a cupboard. They also discovered another child, slightly older, who confirmed they had been held captive and that other children had "disappeared." Further searches uncovered bones in the fireplace, bloodied clothing, scalp fragments, and jars containing preserved remains — small bones, fat, and hair — alongside labeled potions.
The investigation grew quickly. Authorities found records of missing children who had last been seen near Enriqueta's previous lodgings. Witnesses reported seeing children enter but never leave. In total, items linked to at least a dozen children were found in her various apartments.

Enriqueta Martí was arrested on February 27, 1912. The media dubbed her "The Vampire of Barcelona." The public reaction was immediate and explosive. Crowds surrounded the jail, demanding justice. Her case revealed an ugly rift in society: the complicity of silence, the exploitation of the poor, and the hunger of the wealthy for miracle cures that turned suffering into commerce.
Martí denied the killings, claiming the remains found in her possession were those of stillborn infants she had been asked to bury. Her explanations were inconsistent and often contradictory. Though the police gathered physical evidence of human remains, the full extent of her crimes was never brought to trial. Before her case could be heard in court, she was attacked in prison — either beaten to death by fellow inmates or allowed to die through official neglect. She died in 1913, her exact cause of death never formally recorded.
Her trial never took place. No clients were ever identified, and no list of buyers was recovered, though rumors persisted that she served some of Barcelona's most powerful families. For decades afterward, her name lived on in folklore and warnings. Children were told not to wander the streets alone "or the Vampire will take you.
The case of Enriqueta Martí still divides researchers today. Some believe she was a lone killer, deeply disturbed and operating in secrecy. Others argue she was part of a hidden trade — that her role was only one link in a chain of corruption, exploitation, and urban decay. In the absence of a trial, her guilt in many of the deaths remains unproven, but the bones, blood, and testimonies paint a story too consistent to ignore.

Her legacy is one of horror not only for the crimes themselves, but for the silence that surrounded them. She is remembered in Spain not just as a murderer, but as a symbol of the forgotten children of poverty — the ones who vanished and were never searched for.

Marybeth Tinning

Confirmed Kills: 1
Suspected: Up to 9
United States, 1972–1985

Marybeth Roe was born on September 11, 1942, in Duanesburg, a small town in upstate New York. Her early years were not marked by violence or law enforcement involvement, but later narratives described a life full of emotional volatility, low self-esteem, and a longing for sympathy. As a child, she reportedly struggled with feelings of being unwanted and underappreciated, and those who knew her said she often sought attention and affection in subtle, persistent ways.

After high school, she worked a series of menial jobs, eventually securing a position as a nursing assistant at Ellis Hospital in Schenectady. It was there, in 1963, that she met Joseph Tinning, a quiet and unassuming man who worked for General Electric. The couple married in 1965 and settled into a routine, middle-class life. But beneath their domestic normalcy, something strange began to grow — a pattern no one fully recognized until it was too late.

In 1972, the couple's first child, Jennifer, died at just eight days old. The cause was reported as meningitis. Just weeks later, their son Joseph Jr. died suddenly while in Marybeth's care, a death that was attributed to seizures. The tragedies continued at a shocking pace: their next child, Barbara, died in 1974; Timothy in 1975; Nathan in 1978; Mary Frances in 1979; Jonathan in 1979; and finally, Tami Lynne in 1985. In total, nine of Marybeth's children died over the course of thirteen years — all before reaching five years old.

At the time, medical professionals could not find definitive causes for many of the deaths. Some were labeled as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), others as unknown medical conditions. The Tinning family was viewed with a strange combination of sympathy and suspicion. Yet no charges were filed. Neighbors and relatives struggled to comprehend how a mother could lose so many children, while Marybeth appeared at each funeral with quiet tears and a Bible in hand.

The deaths spanned from 1972 to 1985 and occurred in various locations, mostly within the Tinning home. All the children died under Marybeth's direct care. Although only one death — that of her final child, Tami Lynne — was officially proven to be homicide, investigators and prosecutors later suspected foul play in at least eight of the nine cases.

Each incident followed a similar course: the child would be found unresponsive, rushed to the hospital, and declared dead on arrival or shortly after. Marybeth often claimed that the child had suddenly stopped breathing or had suffered seizures. There were no visible signs of trauma, and the victims were all very young. Over time, physicians began to question how so many unexplained deaths could happen in one family.

The Tinnings adopted one child, Michael, in 1978. Though he survived, the death of Jonathan — a biological child — came just weeks after Michael's arrival. This deepened concern among authorities. The pattern of deaths seemed unaffected by biology or genetics. The one common factor in every case was Marybeth.
Despite the suspicions, it wasn't until 1985 — after the death of her ninth child — that a serious investigation began. Tami Lynne, only four months old, was found dead in her crib in the family home. An autopsy revealed clear signs of suffocation, contradicting earlier assumptions about SIDS or natural causes. This time, the police acted.
Marybeth was brought in for questioning and, over the course of a long and emotionally charged interrogation, confessed to smothering three of her children. She stated that she did it because she was overwhelmed and that she had not felt able to handle their crying or behavior. When asked why she had continued to have children, she gave no clear answer. Though she later recanted parts of her confession, the statement was deemed admissible in court.

Marybeth Tinning was arrested in 1985 and charged with the murder of Tami Lynne. The case drew national attention, not only due to the horror of the charges but because of the long history of unexplained deaths surrounding her. It raised troubling questions about how a family could endure so many fatalities without a thorough investigation until the ninth.
Her trial began in 1987. The prosecution focused on Tami Lynne's autopsy and Marybeth's confession. They painted a portrait of a woman who, over the years, may have killed her own children to seek attention and sympathy — a form of behavior associated with what is now more widely understood as Munchausen syndrome by proxy, though that term was not formally used in her trial. The defense argued that the confession was coerced and that the earlier deaths were unrelated, tragic medical cases.
On July 17, 1987, Marybeth Tinning was convicted of second-degree murder in the death of Tami Lynne and sentenced to twenty years to life in prison. She remained incarcerated for over thirty years, consistently denied parole on the basis of her failure to fully take responsibility for the crimes.
In 2018, after showing remorse during her ninth parole hearing, she was granted release. She had served more than three decades behind bars and left prison at the age of seventy-six.
Marybeth's case remains one of the most unsettling examples in American criminal history — not only because of the suspected number of victims, but also because of how long the deaths went unquestioned. It forced a reevaluation of how infant fatalities are classified, how grieving parents are treated by the medical system, and how child death investigations are handled when patterns emerge.
Her story continues to be cited in criminology courses, forensic studies, and psychological research as a rare but critical example of maternal filicide that evaded detection for over a decade.

Genene Jones

Confirmed Kills: 1

Suspected: Up to 60
United States, 1977–1982

Genene Anne Jones was born on July 13, 1950, in San Antonio, Texas. She was adopted as an infant by a well-off couple who owned a nightclub and later ran a series of small businesses. Her upbringing was financially stable, but emotionally closed. She was raised in a strict, conservative household where conformity and loyalty were expected above all. Throughout childhood and adolescence, Genene was seen as emotionally unpredictable — needy, eager for attention, and often fabricating stories about illnesses or mistreatment. She had a reputation for exaggeration, particularly in situations where sympathy could be gained. In school, she struggled both academically and socially. She dropped out before graduation, later earning a GED and enrolling in vocational nursing programs. By the mid-1970s, she was licensed as a vocational nurse — not a full registered nurse, but certified to work under supervision. She held a series of medical support jobs, often in pediatric settings, and quickly gravitated toward emergency rooms and intensive care wards where the pace was high and the emotional stakes even higher.
Despite her mediocre performance and growing complaints from colleagues, Genene presented herself as an unwavering caregiver — authoritative, confident, and tirelessly active. Her manner bordered on aggressive. Other staff noticed that she often seemed most energized during medical crises. She would insert herself into emergencies uninvited, even when patients weren't assigned to her. Many found her pushy, but in environments where quick action was valued, that behavior was tolerated — at least at first.
Over time, however, the pattern became difficult to ignore: infants and toddlers under her care often deteriorated suddenly, without prior signs of distress, and she was almost always nearby.

Between 1977 and 1982, Genene Jones worked in multiple hospitals across Texas, primarily in pediatric wards. During her shifts, the rate of medical emergencies among infants spiked. Children who had been stable would suddenly go into cardiac or respiratory arrest, often within minutes of Genene entering their rooms. Some recovered, others died — and many exhibited unexplained symptoms inconsistent with their diagnoses.
At the heart of these events was a growing suspicion: Genene was deliberately injecting infants with drugs to induce crisis, then rushing to help resuscitate them. The intention was not always death, but to create emergencies in which she could act as savior. This behavior, later labeled by experts as consistent with "hero syndrome," escalated as the frequency and severity of incidents increased. Over time, her interventions began to appear more like orchestrations.
The substances used were typically heparin, digoxin, and succinylcholine — powerful drugs capable of causing blood thinning, cardiac irregularities, or paralysis. In most hospital settings at the time, there was little control over access to these substances, and forensic testing for minute doses was limited. Genene knew this and exploited the gap. Colleagues suspected her, but hospital administrators were reluctant to take formal action, fearing lawsuits, scandal, and public panic.

In 1982, she began working at the Kerrville pediatric clinic run by Dr. Kathleen Holland. Within months, multiple children under Genene's care had medical emergencies. The most notable was 15-month-old Chelsea McClellan, who died suddenly after receiving what was supposedly a routine injection. Autopsy results were inconclusive, but investigators would later discover that Genene had administered succinylcholine, a muscle relaxant used during surgery that, in excessive or unmonitored doses, causes death by respiratory paralysis. Other deaths, including those of infants Rolando Santos and Richard Nelson, began to show similarities in symptoms and drug traces, especially when charted against Genene's work schedule.

By the fall of 1982, the Kerrville clinic grew suspicious. Dr. Holland began reviewing medical charts and found irregularities in dosage and administration logs. When confronted, Genene denied wrongdoing but left the position under pressure. Authorities were contacted, and a wider investigation into her prior hospital employment was launched. What followed was a grim audit: dozens of unexplained infant deaths and near-fatal emergencies traced back to her shifts in San Antonio and Kerrville.

In 1983, Genene Jones was arrested and charged with the murder of Chelsea McClellan and the attempted murder of another infant. During the trial, the prosecution presented evidence that she had administered lethal injections intentionally, relying on her insider knowledge of how hospital systems failed to track or question unexplained medical collapses. Forensic tests confirmed the presence of succinylcholine in Chelsea's tissues — a finding impossible to explain in routine pediatric care.

In 1984, Genene was convicted of murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison. A second conviction for attempted murder added another 60 years. She showed no visible emotion during sentencing, maintaining that she had only ever tried to help her patients. When questioned later about the deaths, she invoked her Fifth Amendment rights and refused to elaborate.

Despite the scale of her suspected crimes — potentially over 60 infant victims — she was only ever tried for a single confirmed death. At the time, Texas law allowed for early release based on good behavior, meaning she could have been eligible for parole after serving a portion of her sentence.

However, in the 2010s, as her release approached, prosecutors reopened several cold cases and charged her with additional murders. In 2020, she pleaded guilty to the 1981 murder of Joshua Sawyer, another infant patient. She received an additional life sentence, ensuring she would remain in prison for the rest of her life.

Genene Jones's case forced a reckoning in pediatric hospital protocols. Her crimes led to stricter oversight on drug administration, tighter regulation of nursing credentials, and more rigorous auditing of unexplained deaths. She is often cited in textbooks as one of the most dangerous medical serial killers in U.S. history, not because of brutality, but because she weaponized care itself — turning the role of nurse into a mask for silent, repeated killing. She remains incarcerated in Texas. The true number of victims will likely never be known.

Delphine LaLaurie

Confirmed Kills: 0 (officially documented)
Suspected: Undetermined (multiple deaths and acts of torture confirmed)
United States, active 1831–1834

Marie Delphine Macarty was born on March 19, 1787, into a wealthy Creole family in New Orleans, Louisiana, during Spanish colonial rule. The Macartys were well-connected, politically influential, and deeply entrenched in the social aristocracy of the city. From birth, Delphine was surrounded by privilege: luxury estates, servants, formal French-style education, and the strict social codes of elite Creole society. She was raised to maintain appearances — grace, hospitality, and control were paramount virtues for women in her class. She was married three times. Her first husband, a Spanish officer, died young. Her second marriage also ended in widowhood. In 1825, she married her third husband, Dr. Leonard Louis Nicolas LaLaurie, a younger physician from France. By this time, Delphine had established herself as one of the city's most elegant and admired women. She hosted lavish parties, dressed in Parisian fashion, and maintained a commanding presence among New Orleans' social elite.
In 1831, she purchased a three-story mansion at 1140 Royal Street in the French Quarter. The house was grand, equipped with slave quarters, balconies, and a private courtyard. From the outside, it appeared a place of refined life and genteel rituals. Inside, it held something else.

Between 1831 and 1834, rumors swirled throughout the Quarter of strange sounds and disappearances at the LaLaurie residence. Slaves who entered the house were not seen again. Those who did emerge appeared underfed, fearful, or bearing signs of injury. Though laws regarding the treatment of slaves were almost non-existent, cruelty in such public measure was still cause for social alarm in New Orleans. Delphine was known to carry a whip, and her household servants were said to move in silence, avoiding eye contact, speaking only when ordered.
One incident in 1833 drew public attention. A twelve-year-old enslaved girl named Leah reportedly fell to her death from a rooftop while fleeing Delphine, who had been chasing her with a whip. The incident was deemed an accident, and Delphine was briefly forced to forfeit nine of her slaves. However, she repurchased them through intermediaries soon after. No charges were brought.
The full horror of the LaLaurie household came to light on April 10, 1834, when a fire broke out in the kitchen. Neighbors rushed to help, and responding authorities forced their way into the upper floors — where they discovered a hidden chamber of torture.
Inside the attic were at least seven enslaved individuals, chained, mutilated, starved, and kept in unimaginable conditions. Reports from that time describe iron collars, limbs stretched or broken, and surgical instruments scattered across the room. The victims had been subject to long-term abuse — starved, flayed, or sewn in unnatural ways. Two were found barely alive, another hanging from the ceiling. The walls bore the stench of rot. Beneath the courtyard, shallow graves revealed remains, though no precise number was ever officially recorded.

The city reeled. Though New Orleans was steeped in the institution of slavery, what had been found exceeded even the brutal norms of the day. These were not acts of punishment or discipline — they were surgical, ritualistic, systematic.

Delphine LaLaurie did not face trial. As a mob gathered outside her mansion, throwing stones and tearing down the gate, she fled by carriage. Accounts suggest she escaped across Lake Pontchartrain and eventually reached Paris, where she lived under the name Madame de Blanque. The mansion was stripped by looters, its furniture burned in the street. Authorities made no serious effort to pursue her. No criminal charges were filed. Her escape became legend — a woman of status vanishing into exile, untouched by law.

She died in 1849, reportedly in Paris, though some accounts claim she secretly returned to New Orleans. No grave has ever been officially confirmed.

In the years following her disappearance, the LaLaurie mansion became a fixture of local folklore. It passed through many hands and was rumored to be cursed. Residents claimed to hear chains, screams, and whispers at night. Stories of buried children, bones in the walls, and secret passages fed the mythos. The building burned again in the 20th century, was rebuilt, and even briefly owned by actor Nicolas Cage.

Delphine LaLaurie remains a figure of infamy — not just for cruelty, but for how her wealth and class protected her from justice. Unlike other killers, she left behind no confessions, no conviction, no moment of reckoning. She was not sentenced, not imprisoned, not held to account. She walked away from the wreckage of her crimes into silence.

To this day, her name conjures one of the darkest images in New Orleans' past: a mansion where music played on the first floor while human suffering echoed in the attic above.